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January 2021

EURO 2020

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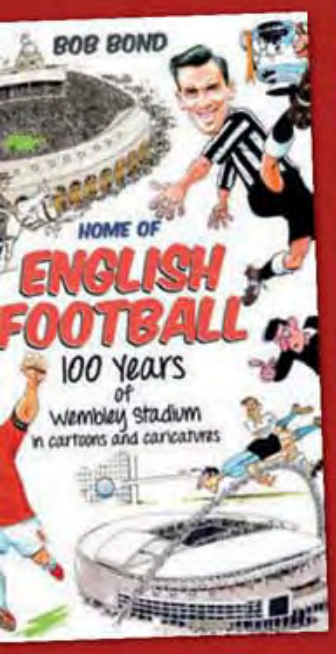

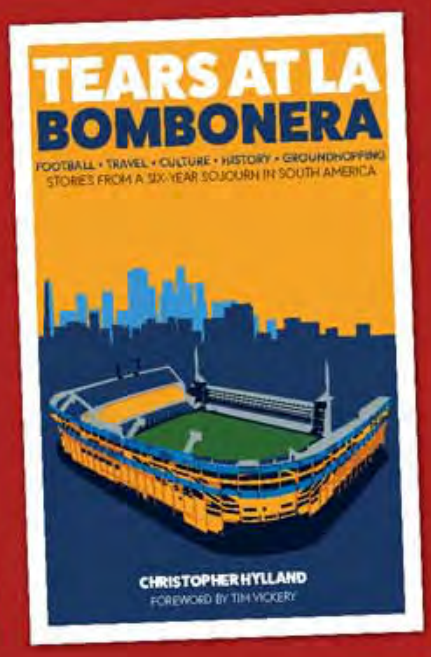

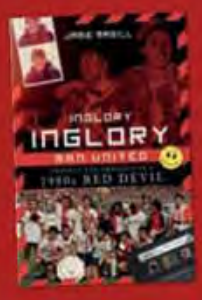

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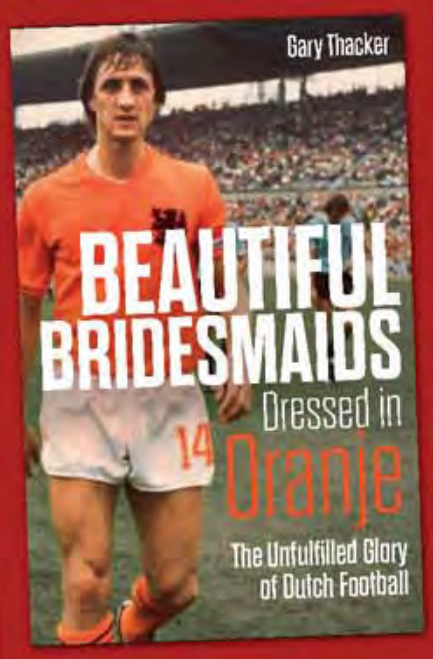

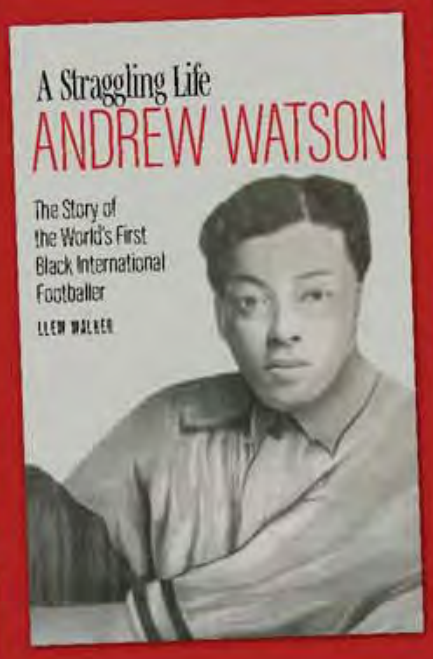

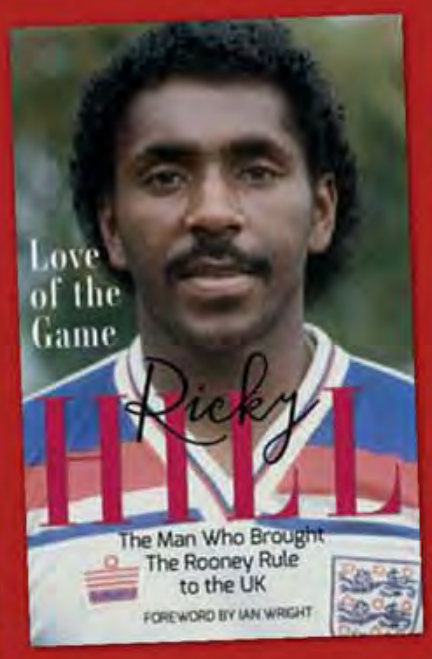

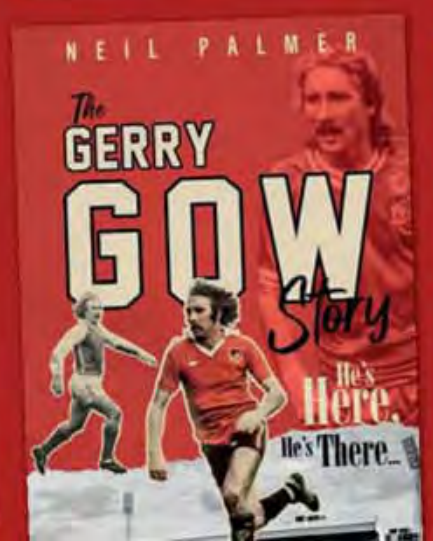

EURO 2020

Countdown to the Euros: All 24 teams at this summer's finals

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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

Argentina...Boca Juniors say goodbye and thank you to their "Eternal" hero Diego Maradona

Gibraltar...ex-international footballer Donovan Torres pays his own personal tribute to *"El Pibe de Oro"*

Syria...a portrait is painted on the walls of a destroyed home to remember Maradona

Spain...Messi celebrates scoring against Osasuna by revealing a Newell's Old Boys shirt – a club both he and Maradona played for in Argentina

Italy...Napoli fans visit a giant mural of their club legend in Naples

Italy...Napoli also honour Maradona with a specially-designed kit ahead of their Europa League clash v Rijeka

NAPOLI
STADIO DIEGO
ARMANDO
MARADONA
CURVA B
THE KING
NAPOLI
CI MANCHERAI
UN SALUTO DA ALFONSO
RICCARDO
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Lete

Italy...tributes outside the San Paolo Stadium, soon to be renamed the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium

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FROM THE EDITOR

Sadly, Diego Maradona's career came before my time – I missed his golden era. My first vivid memory of him was from the 1994 World Cup when he scored against Greece and ran towards the pitch-side camera with that infamous wide-mouthed celebration.

My dad told me during USA '94 that Maradona was the greatest player he'd ever seen, so I had to find out more about this "legendary" footballer. I delved through my uncle's VHS collection and found videos of Italia '90 and Mexico '86. And it was only after watching those tournament highlights that I realised what all the fuss was about. Victor Hugo Morales' famous commentary for Maradona's once-in-a-lifetime goal for Argentina against England at the 1986 World Cup sums it up best:

"Goaaaaaal! Goaaaaal! I want to cry! Holy God, long live football! What a goal! Diegoal! Maradona! I can't help crying, forgive me! Maradona, on an unforgettable run, in the greatest play of all time! Cosmic kite, what planet did you come from?…Diegoal! Diegoal! Diego Armando Maradona! Thank you, God, for football, for Maradona, for these tears."

The impression Maradona left on me as a young football fan pales into insignificance with the indelible mark he left on fans who watched this goal live, and those who watched him play throughout the 1980s. I grew up on a diet of Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldinho, Kaka, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo all being heralded as the greatest players of their generation, but whenever that conversation extended to a greatest-of-all-time debate, Maradona always entered the equation – and more often than not won. Long after he retired Maradona's legacy continued to live on, and it will do so even more now.

Long after he retired Maradona's legacy continued to live on, and it will do so even more now

Overseeing this special issue of *World Soccer*, which remembers "*El Pibe de Oro*", has not only been a privilege, but also an enlightening experience. Seeing the tributes (page 4) and outpouring of grief (page 28) since Maradona's passing shows what he meant to the football world and its followers. And his genius on the pitch is given a fitting send-off. Keir Radnedge looks back at his magical but often tragic career (page 14); Jonathan Wilson discusses how he practically single-handedly won the World Cup (page 16); Tim Vickery eulogises his Argentina legacy (page 24); and Paddy Agnew remembers how Naples took Diego to their heart, immortalising him with almost God-like status (page 26). That alone shows how he truly transcended the game.

As the man himself said in an interview with *World Soccer* back in 1986 (page 30): "You will never find me saying I'm the best. If other people choose to say so, that is their business." And believe me, plenty of people say so. Rest in peace, *Eterno* Diego.

Stephen Fishlock, Group Editor

EUROPE

2022 World Cup qualifying groups revealed

England have been paired with Robert Lewandowski and Poland in possibly the most eye-catching group of the European section of the 2022 World Cup qualifying draw.

None of the big-hitters have been tasked with notably tough tests, with holders France drawn with Ukraine, whom they beat 7-1 in October. FIFA's No.1 ranked side Belgium top a group featuring Wales and Czech Republic, Scotland will renew their rivalry with Israel after facing them five times since 2018, Northern Ireland will have to overcome Switzerland and Italy to reach their first World Cup since 1986, and the Republic of Ireland must get the better of European champions and Nations League holders Portugal to progress to Qatar.

For the full draw, turn to page 96 or go online at worldsoccer.com

ENGLAND

Calls for help in dementia studies

The University of East Anglia is looking for help as they continue their research into the links between football and dementia.

"I love you, Diego. My great friend, thank you very much for our entire journey. One day, in heaven, we will play together on the same team…and I can finally embrace you again"

One football great in Pele recognises another with a touching Maradona tribute

Thumbs up…England have been a handed a straightforward draw

The studies come after growing concerns regarding the long-term health of former players, with Kenny Sansom the latest in a long line of ex-England players to be diagnosed with a form of dementia.

Dr. Michael Grey, the leader of the research, says that more volunteers are needed: "We are looking for women and men over 40, who live in the UK and do not have a diagnosis of dementia."

A study from Glasgow University has already found that footballers are up to three and half times more likely to develop dementia than the general population. Early signs from the latest study suggest that women may be at greater risk than men.

"We think female players are at even greater risk of developing sport-related dementia than male players. But we don't fully understand the impact these differences could have, so we are encouraging former amateur and professional female players to come forward to help us with our project," said Dr. Grey.

"Testing is conducted on a computer or tablet from the comfort of their own homes and takes around 30 minutes, four times per year," he added.

To take part, visit *www.scoresproject.org* or for more information via email, simply contact *scoresproject@uea.ac.uk*

Diagnosed…ex-England full-back Kenny Sansom

HEROES & VILLAINS

Hero…Marcus Rashford

MARCUS RASHFORD

The Manchester United star's latest act of charity has been to launch a book club to give disadvantaged children access to literature. "I only started reading at 17, and it completely changed my outlook and mentality," he said. "I just wish I was offered the opportunity to really engage with reading more as a child."

GARETH BALE

Rashford isn't the only star who's been doing his bit for charity. Bale donated £15,000 to a project in Swansea that was set up to feed struggling families at Christmas. The Wales forward was asked to donate a signed shirt for auction, which he did, but then followed it up with a cash donation worth 300 food hampers.

MARINE

Every season needs a story of FA Cup romance, but this tale is better than most. From the eighth tier of English football, the Merseyside club have already won seven ties to reach the third round, but up next they will face Jose Mourinho's Tottenham at home. "It's an unbelievable draw," cheered Marine boss Neil Young.

ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC

The evergreen 39-year-old is spearheading Milan's title charge, becoming the first player in Serie A to score ten goals this season, and could be set for a new contract. Zlatan recently revealed he almost retired in the summer, but now seems set to play beyond his 40th birthday.

BARCELONA PLAYERS

To help ease the economic burden at the Nou Camp, Barcelona's players have taken a pay cut – estimated to save the club £110 million. It follows similar action last March, when they took a 70 per cent pay cut to allow non-playing staff to receive their full wages.

CELTIC SUPPORTERS

The Scottish champions' poor start to the season has been met with outright fury from their supporters, with plenty of fans gathering outside Celtic Park to vent their frustrations, protesting at both the board and manager Neil Lennon. The demonstrations went too far however, with two men arrested for "disorder offences," and police stating that they went against lockdown restrictions.

STEPHANE BAHOKEN

In October, the Angers and Cameroon striker was handed a suspended prison sentence for acts of domestic violence against his partner, along with a three-month suspended sentence for a traffic violation. In total, the player was fined over €8,000 for both incidents.

JORDAN JONES & GEORGE EDMUNDSON

In the latest example of Scottish Premiership players flouting lockdown rules, the Rangers duo were investigated by both their club and the Scottish FA after attending a party at the start of November, and were handed seven-match bans as punishment. Aberdeen and Celtic were both fined earlier in the season for similar offences by their players.

TROY DEENEY

The Watford striker and *Talksport* pundit came in for fierce criticism after comments on concussion in football. Deeney argued that footballers should be allowed to assess their own ability to carry on playing after head injuries, saying: "As a player you know when something is not right." Following a social media backlash following the clash of heads between Arsenal's David Luiz and Wolverhampton Wanderers' Raul Jimenez, the radio station removed the clip from their Twitter feed.

Criticised…Watford captain Troy Deeney

"A legend has left us…he was our guide to what football was. Maradona is football. He looked after me at Sevilla and showed me what it meant to play for Argentina. He was and is the best"

Diego Simeone on the impact Maradona had on his football generation

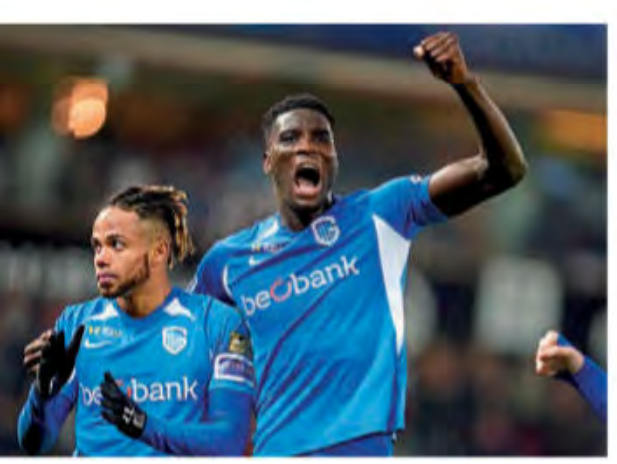
Theo BONGONDA

(Genk)

Signed by Celta Vigo in 2015 as a hugely promising 19-year-old, Bongonda has been touted as one to watch for several years. In 2017 he declared: "If Chelsea, Manchester United or Atletico Madrid call me in the near future I should be ready to make the step up to join them."

However, that career plan didn't quite work out, and his next club turned out to be Trabzonspor in Turkey, where he made just three league appearances before returning to his first club, Zulte Waregem, in the Belgian Pro League.

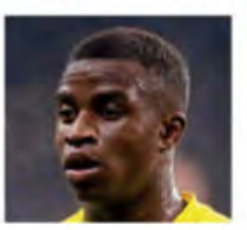
After joining Genk in 2019, he is beginning to capitalise on his undoubted potential. By the start of December he had already scored his tenth league goal of the season – making this the most prolific campaign of his career already – and formed a thrilling attacking line-up alongside Nigerian frontman Paul Onuachu and Japan winger Junya Ito.



PEDRO GONCALVES
(Sporting)
The 22-year-old midfielder hit ten goals in his first eight Primeira Liga games until a suspension interrupted his hot streak.

ALVARO CERVERA
(Cadiz)
After ending the club's 14-year absence from La Liga, the coach has Cadiz flying high in the Spanish top flight, beating both Barcelona and Real Madrid.

CADEN CLARK
(New York Red Bulls)
The 17-year-old midfielder became the youngest player in Major League Soccer history to score in both of his first two matches – both absolute screamers.



JAMAL MUSIALA
(Bayern Munich)
Although the 17-year-old is still eligible to play for Germany, he scored on his debut for the England Under-21s.

YOUSSOUFA MOUKOKO
(Borussia Dortmund)
Having hit 141 goals in 88 games for Dortmund's youth teams, the 16-year-old is now the Champions League and Bundesliga's youngest-ever player.

ALEN HALILOVIC
(Birmingham City)
The former Barcelona and Milan wonderkid is hoping to rebuild his career in the English second tier after joining Birmingham City.

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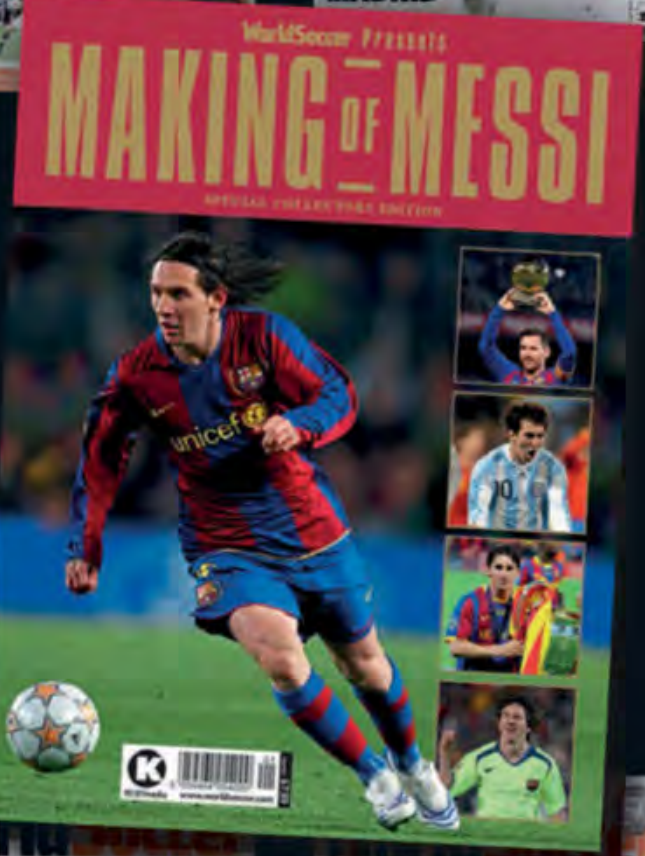
MAKING OF MESSI



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Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Diego Maradona: a tribute

Back in 1975, staring at me out of the pages of long-gone Argentinian sports magazine *El Grafico*, was a stark colour picture of delight of a tousled-haired 15-year-old. He was captioned as Diego Armando Maradona. He was a kid from the wrong side of the tracks who would rule the world.

Maradona was making his debut for Argentinos Juniors in troubled times. Argentina was tumbling out of political turmoil into the long dark years of the military junta. For the Generals, distractions were essential. Like hosting the World Cup in 1978.

Maradona might even have played in that World Cup after making his debut against Hungary at 16 years 120 days. Instead, he was one of three players dropped on the eve of the finals when coach Cesar Luis Menotti trimmed the squad. Maradona stormed out of the camp and wept for three days.

The next year, Maradona captained an ultimately triumphant Argentina at the World Youth Cup in Japan. That proved to be one of 12 trophies he'd win during his career and which would glitter out of the multiplicity of pictures unearthed in the world's photo archives on his death at the age of 60.

Argentina's media had been on tenterhooks for years awaiting the day which would convulse a nation. Every time the rumour mill claimed that "*El Pibe de Oro*" (Golden Boy) had been taken ill, so the editors cleared the decks for the worst. As daily paper *Clarin* reported with that long-awaited, long-feared finality on November 25, 2020: "This had to happen one day."

The first day was October 30, 1960, in the intimidating Villa Fiorito shanty in the province of Buenos Aires. There was no easy way out. At least football was one. At nine Diego began playing for a kids team named Estrella Roja (Red Star). Later he and his friends founded a team called Los Cebollitas (The Little Onions). They were turned en bloc by Argentinos Juniors into one of the club's youth sides.

On October 20, 1976, Maradona made his debut as a 15-year-old substitute against Talleres of Cordoba. A week later came his first start against Newell's Old Boys. The next 44 years would be fraught with contradictions and conflict between Maradona the footballer on one hand, and Maradona the controversialist on the other.

Iconic No.10... Diego Maradona

> His skill, perception, awareness, range of passing, technique and match-reading were sublime. His left foot magnetised the ball and his skills mesmerised both opponents and fans

Initially the footballer ruled. He was the classic Argentinian No.10, denoting a team's creative fantasist. Boca Juniors, team of his dreams, bought him for £1 million in 1981, leaned on his gifts to win the championship, then sold him to Barcelona for £3m in 1982 – a then world-record transfer.

On the way Maradona succumbed to the pressures of the World Cup, in Spain in 1982. He was a marked man. The official film records Italy's Claudio Gentile tracking him relentlessly, step by step, in a 2-1 defeat. Ironically, when Maradona's patience snapped, it was Brazil's Batista next time out that felt the full force of a boot in his groin. Red card for Maradona. Welcome to Spain.

Maradona's first season there was interrupted by hepatitis; his second by a notorious wrecking tackle from "The Butcher of Bilbao", Andoni Goikoetxea. The two players renewed hostilities in the 1984 Copa del Rey final. Maradona was at the centre of a mass brawl in front of King Juan Carlos. He had to go.

His destination was Napoli, for yet another world record – £5m this time. Within weeks, Napoli sold a staggering 70,000 season tickets. The shady source of the transfer cash guarantee was an open secret. Maradona inspired the club to its first two Serie A titles, two second places, a Coppa Italia and Supercoppa as well as the UEFA Cup.

Increasingly, however, Maradona became entangled in his own fame, the claustrophobic adulation, the money, the girls, the drugs...and the *Camorra*.

The maelstrom of entrapment was captured frighteningly in Asif Kapadia's film, *Diego Maradona*. Personal trainer Fernando Signorini expressed the dichotomy of his self-destructive genius perfectly, saying: "For Diego, I would go to the end of the world, but for 'Maradona' I wouldn't take a step."

At this point in the 1980s Maradona the footballer could do no wrong. His skill, perception, awareness, range of passing, technique and match-reading were sublime. His left foot magnetised the ball and his skills mesmerised both opponents and fans. Especially Napoli fans who worshipped him with shrines.

Simultaneously Maradona turned Argentina into world champions once more in 1986 in Mexico, usurping 1978 skipper Daniel Passarella as captain shortly before the World Cup. This writer was sitting in the Estadio Azteca for the quarter-final against England: we saw what the referee did not, the "Hand of God". We also all saw the lightning-touch acceleration with which Maradona ghosted through England's defence for his second goal.

He darted in from the right on that occasion then, barely remembered now, scored a mirror-image goal, cutting in from the left this time, in the semi-finals against Belgium.

Victory over the old colonialist England, coupled with the cheek of its achievement, was a gesture of national retaliation after the Falklands War. The "Hand of God" expressed a defiance of society's establishment with all its restrictive rules and regulations. This was why so many millions loved him: Maradona: mocked officialdom in a way they dared not. The more outspoken he became, so the greater the adulation but the more inevitable the revenge of an unforgiving ruling class.

The 1990 World Cup in Italy was the beginning of the end. Maradona played inspirationally again, despite badly damaged ankles. He even missed a penalty in the quarter-final shoot-out against Yugoslavia but Argentina still reached the semis. Drama piled upon drama: the draw matched Argentina and Maradona on his adopted home ground in Naples against Italy.

Maradona appealed to depressed southern Italy in general, and Napoli fans in particular, to support him as a gesture against the Italy of wealth and privilege. But when Argentina won on penalties, Italy fell out of love with him. In the final Argentina had two men sent off and lost 1-0 to West Germany on a contentious late spot-kick. Maradona, in tears at the final whistle, furiously blamed a conspiracy between FIFA's Brazilian president Joao Havelange and Italy's governing elite. Suddenly Maradona was no fun any more. The balance of power tipped against him.

The cocaine parties after Napoli's weekend matches had been an open secret. Dope testers turned up regularly but only later in the week when illicit substances had been sweated away. That was the deal. Until March 17, 1991. Then a test from a post-match swoop after a 1-0 victory over Bari came up positive. Revenge served cold. He was banned for 15 months.

Maradona sought to revive his career in Spain with Sevilla and again with Newell's Old Boys, before leading Argentina to the 1994 World Cup. There, in a press conference in Dallas, FIFA decreed this comeback over with a dope test for ephedrine and a new 15-month ban. He had played his 91st and final game for Argentina, scoring the last of his 34 goals.

A further comeback with Boca ended in another dope test, which forced permanent retirement. But abandoning the game that had been his life was out of the question. A string of short-lived coaching appointments followed in UAE, Mexico and Argentina (latterly with Gimnasia de La Plata). He even led Argentina to the quarter-finals of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Memory...Maradona's cameo for Spurs in Ossie Ardiles' testimonial in 1986

Along the way Maradona was treated for weight problems, drug addictions, a heart attack and a concoction of health issues. Yet he remained a magnet for fans and media everywhere.

He was still working with Gimnasia when he was diagnosed with a subdural hematoma in November and underwent emergency brain surgery. He seemed to have come through the operation and was released from the clinic when he suffered a fatal heart attack at his home in Tigre. Argentina declared three days of national mourning. Before the funeral his coffin lay in state at the Casa Rosada presidential palace.

So many stories: the financial fall-outs with his agents; the paternity suit brought by Cristiana Sinagra; friendship with Fidel Castro; firing an air gun at reporters outside his home; and the derisive barb he offered me five years ago about old FIFA president Sepp Blatter "who was chasing champagne while I was winning World Cups."

Yet also the solo goal which brought admiring Real Madrid fans to their feet in his first season at Barca; a cameo at Tottenham in tandem with Glenn Hoddle at Ossie Ardiles' testimonial; the reverse-passing magic with Careca at Napoli; and fans of so many teams who succumbed to his magic.

Maradona counts among the three greatest footballers I have had the privilege to watch in action, along with Pele and Alfredo Di Stefano. As for that third Argentinian, Leo Messi? A wonderful player but not on the same sporting stratosphere. With Maradona there was always a unique volcanic tang of barely repressed danger.

In the musical *Evita*, Tim Rice created words for Eva Peron that might equally serve as an epitaph for Maradona too:

"The choice was mine, and mine completely. I could have any prize that I desired. I could burn with the splendour of the brightest fire. Or else, or else I could choose time."

Football will always honour the brightest fire that was Diego Armando Maradona.

BOOKS THIS MONTH

THE 50: FOOTBALL'S MOST INFLUENTIAL PLAYERS
by Jon Driscoll (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

Tells the history of the game through a series of mini biographies, sweeping through time and around the world: from Charles Alcock to Megan Rapinoe and Raheem Sterling. All the greats are included: Matthews, Maradona, Messi, but there are also lesser talents such as Jean-Marc Bosman, who turned football finance on its head. Each chapter tells the fascinating story of the players' careers and judges the mark they left on football.

BRITISH FOOTBALL'S GREATEST GROUNDS
by Mike Bayly (Pitch Publishing, £30)

A collection of absolutely stunning photography touring British football's most iconic and picturesque grounds. From Premier League stadia to some lesser-known grounds nestling next to castles, beaches and mountain ranges. This is part guide, part bucket list, part love letter to the history, people and places that showcase the best of Britain's football landscape.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

How Maradona and Argentina won the World Cup

From the moment he landed the Argentina job in 1983, Carlos Bilardo knew he had to build his team for the 1986 World Cup around Diego Maradona. In 1982, Cesar Luis Menotti had played Maradona as a classic No.10 behind a front two and it hadn't worked. As opponents focused on closing Maradona down, knowing he was at the heart of all their creativity, he ended up being kicked into relative ineffectiveness, before eventually being sent off as he lashed out against Brazil, Argentina's third defeat in five games in Spain.

Maradona's move to Barcelona had only brought further difficulties, as he struggled to settle and contracted hepatitis. In January 1983, as Maradona recuperated in Lloret de Mar on the Costa Brava, Bilardo went to visit him. They went jogging on the beach together and discussed how Argentina could best set up. Maradona didn't actually play again for the national team between the 1982 World Cup and a pair of friendlies against Paraguay and Chile in May 1985, but Bilardo had announced not only that he would be captain at the World Cup but that he was the only player sure of his place in Mexico.

Coach and captain... Carlos Bilardo and Maradona in Mexico

> The suggestion that Diego Maradona won that World Cup almost singlehanded isn't entirely untrue, but he was only able to do so because of a structure that gave him the platform to do so

But just because Maradona wasn't playing for the national side didn't mean Bilardo wasn't preparing for him. Argentina's form in 1984 was dreadful and they hadn't won in five games when they embarked on a tour of Europe in September. Bilardo, though, wasn't worried; he didn't care about friendlies or sponsors' tournaments. He wasn't even that bothered when Argentina were eliminated in the group stage of the 1983 Copa America (a far less prestigious tournament in those days). Everything was about the World Cup.

On that tour, Bilardo unveiled his tactical master plan: a highly unusual 3-5-2 formation. Denmark under Sepp Piontek and Dinamo Zagreb under Ciro Blazevic both began playing something similar at around the same time, but Bilardo always claimed he came up with the system himself, reasoning that if nobody was using wingers any more there was no need to play orthodox full-backs. He didn't have Maradona on that tour, but he did have another classic No.10, Ricardo Bochini, who began to be used not behind a front two, but as the second of two centre-forwards, with a base of three midfielders behind him.

"It was very difficult to set up but I was convinced it was the best shape for us," he said. "But everyone, from fans to journalists to players, kept asking me, 'But who's the right-winger? But who's the left-back?' It was very difficult to explain that fixed positions were no longer useful. So I said, 'Right now, I prefer to be understood by 30 players rather than by 30 million Argentinians.'" Argentina beat Switzerland and Belgium 2-0 and West Germany 3-1, at which point Bilardo, not wanting to alert the rest of the world to what he was doing, hid the formation away.

Unleashed...Bilardo unveiled his secret weapon against England in the quarter-final

In 1966, Alf Ramsey decided against using his 4-4-2 through the group stage, preferring to wait until his England came up against an opponent he needed to use it against: Argentina in the quarter-final. Bilardo followed much the same plan, and only unveiled his 3-5-2 with Maradona playing off Jorge Valdano for the quarter-final against England. "You can't play against the English with a pure centre-forward," Bilardo explained. "They'd devour him, and the extra man in midfield will give Maradona more room."

So Pedro Pasculli was dropped for the midfielder Hector Enrique. Argentina had their solid base: an uncomplicated back three with Jose Batista a ball-playing midfield anchor just in front of them and Jorge Burrachaga and Hector Enrique flanking him, looking to break forward to support Valdano. Maradona thus had an almost completely free role, which is why he was able so often to pick up the ball in areas away from opposition marking.

England never got to grips with Maradona in that quarter-final and while they did trouble Argentina after bringing on John Barnes and Chris Waddle to play wide midway through the second half, the lesson went unheeded. In the semi-final, Belgium, operating their own 3-5-2 variant, packed the centre, and in so doing failed to exploit the space that was available between two wing-backs just learning their roles, Ricardo Giusti and Julio Olarticoechea. In the final against West Germany it was a similar story, Argentina eventually coming out on top as Maradona at last slipped away from Lothar Matthaus and fed Burrachaga, one of those runners from deep, to score the winner.

The suggestion that Diego Maradona won that World Cup almost singlehanded isn't entirely untrue, but he was only able to do so because of a structure that gave him the platform to do so, both in offering defensive cover behind him and passing options going beyond him to provide an option other than the dribbling at which he excelled.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Lescott...out of retirement

1 SURPRISING SIGNING

It was a big surprise when Spanish side Racing Murcia announced that they had signed former England defender Joleon Lescott, who retired in 2017 after a year at Sunderland. In fact, the move was so surprising, even Lescott himself didn't know about it. "There's been an offer for me to go and take part in a game in Spain, which I'm exploring," he told *BBC Radio*. "I didn't know I'd signed – I'd had a conversation. It appears I'm coming out of retirement but I'd only be participating in one game."

2 SWEDISH CHICANERY

To Sweden now for some world-class gamesmanship. With the scores tied at 2-2 in stoppage time, AIK were so desperate for a winner they sent their goalkeeper up for a corner, but alarm bells started ringing when the ball went for a goal-kick and Elfsborg launched a quick counter-attack. Wily midfielder Sebastian Larsson had the situation under control though; grabbing a spare ball and booting it back in play towards the onrushing Elfsborg attack. The ref was force to stop the game, Larsson was booked, and the game finished 2-2.

3 ANOTHER ANIMAL INTERRUPTION

A couple of months ago we told you about a non-league game in England that was interrupted by an alpaca. In Brazil, another game was brought to a halt by a different species: this time, it was ants. The Serie C match between Ferroviario and Jacuipense had to stop for five minutes after the visitors' goalkeeper Jordan landed on an anthill in the goalmouth, then had to wash them off with a quick sponge bath.

4 MOST DRAMATIC SHOOT-OUT EVER?

There's a lot to pack in here, so bear with us. In the quarter-final of the MLS play-offs, Orlando City were leading New York City 4-3 in a penalty shoot-out, and thought they had sealed the win with a save from Pedro Gallese. Their celebrations were cut short, however, when the referee ruled that the goalkeeper had moved off his line too early. Not only was the spot-kick retaken, Gallese was shown a second yellow card for the infraction. Next, substitute Brian Rowe put his gloves on to go in goal, but – eventually – was told that subs could not be made during the shoot-out. So, defender Rodrigo Schlegel went in instead. Two kicks later, the Argentine pulled off an unlikely save and, thinking that this was enough to seal the victory, set off to celebrate with his team-mates. Yet once again, the celebrations were premature: the score was still 5-5. Thankfully, Schlegel's blushes were spared when Benji Michel slotted in his kick to seal the victory. Phew...

5 SILLY SILAS

After a mix-up in the Werder Bremen penalty area, Stuttgart striker Silas Wamangituka was left with the simple task of tapping the ball home. But instead, he chose to take his time, walking towards the goal at a snail's pace. When Werder Bremen's keeper tried to close him down, he hammered the ball in from approximately two inches away, at which point the referee booked him for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Tap-in... Wamangituka scores against Bremen

Paul GARDNER

GLOBAL VIEW

IFAB's inertia and the overly active VAR

In 1925 the International Football Association Board – IFAB, the people who write and, when necessary, revise the playing rules of football – took decisive action to halt a trend that many claimed was killing the sport. Teams were using the offside trap to squelch attacking moves before they could get going. Fewer and fewer goals were being scored.

So IFAB altered the offside rule, making the offside trap a much more risky manoeuvre for defenders. The move paid off immediately. Under the old rules, in 1924–25, the four divisions of England's Football League produced 4,700 goals. The following year, under the changed rule, that went up to 6,373.

What IFAB had done was to pay attention to a fundamental aspect of football – indeed, of all competitive sports – the balance between attack and defence. Football was out of balance; it had become too difficult to score goals.

It wasn't long before defensive tactics (notably Arsenal's "third back" game) were developed to once again reduce goalscoring. Deplorably, IFAB lost interest. Never again has it paid any attention to the offence-defence balance.

With the result that goals have slowly drained away. The statistic for goals-per-game in the World Cup starkly tells the dismal story: first five World Cups (1930–1954): 4.4 goals per game; in the last five (2002–2018), that figure has dropped to 2.48.

Damage...Pickford's challenge ended Van Dijk's season

but I doubt it. Even where IFAB has managed to lay down sensible VAR guidelines, it fails to enforce them. An obviously useful tool has been allowed to spread itself into areas where it doesn't belong. Millimetric (dubbed, justifiably, sillymetric) offside calls abound and invite scorn and derision.

The "VAR Protocol", which is now part of the IFAB-published "Laws of the Game" says, with commendable clarity: "A video assistant referee (VAR)... may assist the referee only in the event of a 'clear and obvious error'" Surely, failure to detect a 10mm offside infringement by a big toe cannot possibly be a clear and obvious error? Yet that is exactly the sort of ridiculous call that has come to typify VAR.

> Nearly two goals-per-game have been lost, but IFAB has done precisely nothing to stem the haemorrhage

Nearly two goals-per-game have been lost, but IFAB has done precisely nothing to stem the haemorrhage. It has totally lost sight of the vital importance of balance in the sport – it has, in effect, been asleep since making its splendid 1925 rule change.

Technology – marked by the arrival of VAR – may shake IFAB into life,

Of course IFAB should intervene. Then again, maybe not. IFAB has stepped in to clarify the definition of handball – and has succeeded in turning what merely puzzled into what now utterly bewilders.

Causing bafflement among those trying to make sense of the rules is far from being the worst of IFAB's drawbacks. Decades of sloth have nurtured a quite extraordinary – and dangerous – laxity in the enforcement of some of the sport's rules.

The rules in question are not new. They date back to the very beginning of the sport. They are intended, as are most of the rules in Law 12, to greatly limit the extent of physical contact.

IFAB seems unaware that these anti-violence rules apply to all players – including, crucially, goalkeepers.

Thus, goalkeepers are consistently allowed to violently jump into their opponents, often causing serious head injuries. Goalkeepers are also routinely permitted to dive head first at an opponent's feet – a reckless manoeuvre, clearly a contravention of the rule against "playing in a dangerous manner", where the goalkeeper is the player most at risk of injury. The rule specifically states that the play "threatens injury to someone (including the player themself)."

The idea that goalkeepers are allowed to wipe out any player who gets in their way is now so widely accepted that it looks almost like

a game-wide conspiracy among IFAB (which refuses to ensure that its rules are enforced), referees (who simply ignore the rules), and coaches and players (who rarely complain).

Just listen to the words of Brad Friedel, the American goalkeeper who spent most of his career playing in the English Premier League. This is Friedel, in his role as a TV guru, having just watched a goalkeeper leaping, with raised knee, to smash into an opponent: "That is outstanding goalkeeping...a big strong punch, a big strong body, big collision...exactly what you want..."

The alarm bells on these fouls rang loudly in the 1982 World Cup, when West Germany goalkeeper Harald Schumacher brutally "assaulted" France's Patrick Battiston and sent him to hospital with serious head injuries. Schumacher went unpunished.

IFAB had nothing to say about the incident. The mayhem continued, reaching its obvious and wretched climax in 2017 when a professional goalkeeper was seriously injured after diving into the swinging feet of a goalmouth melee. He was rushed to hospital, where he died. The tragedy happened in Indonesia. Again, IFAB – indeed, the whole sport – simply ignored it.

Inevitably, as goalkeepers have recognised their relative immunity to punishment, their play has become more reckless. A couple of months back Everton's Jordan Pickford launched himself into Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk with a crudely violent tackle that will see Van Dijk sidelined for months with a serious ACL injury. A blatant red-card foul, but Pickford escaped – and VAR failed to even review the tackle.

Of course, it is not just in the pro game that tragedy strikes. Teenage boys were killed in goalkeeper collisions in the USA in 2015, and England in 2018 (one of them was a goalkeeper).

Despite the mounting evidence that sports need to do all they can to reduce head injuries, IFAB has done nothing. Yes, football – the one sport in which the head is widely used to play the ball – has introduced a "concussion protocol", but that simply ensures better treatment after a concussion has occurred. It does nothing to reduce the frequency of head injuries.

Only rule changes will do that, but IFAB will not act. It will not even act in the case of goalkeeper violence, where the necessary rules are already in place.

The inaction of IFAB and FIFA is exposing football to the distinct possibility of damaging legal action over serious injury or death.

The only way that I can see football responding to the threat posed by concussions is to abolish the archaic and smugly somnolent IFAB and to replace it with a body that will not only safeguard the rules, and keep a watchful eye on the balance between attack and defence, but will also act humanely to ensure the safety of its players.

Collision...Schumacher went unpunished for his infamous challenge on Battiston

OBITUARIES

Upset...Diop celebrates his iconic World Cup goal v France

Papa Bouba DIOP (1978-2020)
A World Cup legend as the man who hit the opening goal of the 2002 tournament, stunning holders France in a 1-0 victory for Senegal. After impressing in Japan and South Korea, he went on to play in England for Fulham, Portsmouth, West Ham and Birmingham.

Charles CORVER (1936-2020)
Refereed more than 740 games, yet his most famous moment came in the West Germany v France 1982 World Cup semi-final when he gave no foul for Harald Schumacher's horror tackle on Patrick Battiston.

Assistant...Setters & Charlton

Maurice SETTERS (1936-2020)
An FA Cup winner with Manchester United in 1963, wing-half Setters played more than 500 professional matches before a career in coaching, most notably assisting Jack Charlton throughout his reign as the Republic of Ireland manager.

Pim DOESBURG (1943-2020)
Won eight caps for the Netherlands as goalkeeper, including playing at Euro '80, and set the record for most games in the Dutch league – 687 in 25 years with Sparta Rotterdam and PSV.

Mark Gleeson

Andrzej GOWARZEWSKI (1945-2020)
Gowarzewski's records of the game transcended linguistic barriers and were renowned as the go-to source of authoritative information. No championship could be complete without the Gowarzewski "bible".

Keir Radnedge

Anele NGCONGCA (1987-2020)
Defender who played for South Africa at the 2010 World Cup. Won the Belgian league with Genk before returning home to win the 2016 CAF Champions League with Mamelodi Sundowns. Sadly died in a car crash after being sent on loan to AmaZulu.

Mark Gleeson

Ngcongca...in action at World Cup 2010 for Bafana Bafana

"I'm deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Ray Clemence. Clem was my coach with England for more than a decade. A lovely man with a wicked left foot. I had a poster of him on my wall as a kid"

Former England goalkeeper David James pays tribute to Ray Clemence

OBITUARIES

Ray CLEMENCE (1948-2020)

In the Past Players section of Liverpool's official website, Ray Clemence is described as: "Without doubt the greatest goalkeeper ever to play for Liverpool."

Given that he was a regular during the Reds' glory years of the late '70s, winning five league titles, an FA Cup, a League Cup, two UEFA Cups and – most importantly – three European Cups, it is a statement that is hard to disagree with. Those achievements are particularly impressive given how reluctant he was to play in goal. "I never wanted to be a goalkeeper. I never really played in goal until I was 15," he told *lfchistory.net*. "One day we were short of a goalkeeper and the sports master at school nominated me to go into goal. When I went in it was just natural for me, but I still didn't really want to be a goalkeeper."

Within two years he was starting in goal for Scunthorpe United, where he was spotted by Bill Shankly and signed by the then-Liverpool manager. In 14 years at Anfield Clemence made 665 appearances, putting him joint-fourth on the club's all-time list (tied with Emlyn Hughes).

Keeper...Clemence has died aged 72

Euro '80...Clemence saves a penalty against Spain in the group stage

In 1981 he joined Tottenham Hotspur where he continued to win trophies and cement his reputation as one of Europe's finest shot-stoppers. In his first season at White Hart Lane, he helped the team keep five clean sheets on the road to winning the FA Cup. Two years later he added to his collection of European medals by winning the UEFA Cup again, although injury meant that he watched from the bench as his replacement Tony Parks became the hero in the decisive penalty shoot-out. He retired in 1988 after an ankle injury.

Only one goalkeeper (Real Madrid's Juan Alonso) and only one Englishman (his former team-mate Phil Neal) won more European Cups than Clemence, yet his international career was somewhat unfulfilled. Having made his England debut in 1972, he had to wait until the 1980 European Championship for the Three Lions to qualify for a major tournament, where he shared goalkeeping duties with Peter Shilton, as England failed to qualify from their group. At the World Cup two years later in Spain, Shilton was the established No.1, and the following year Clemence retired from international football having won 61 caps.

That didn't stop him from serving in England's backroom team for 17 years though, first joining Glenn Hoddle's staff in 1996 and going on to work with Kevin Keegan and Sven-Goran Eriksson. In spite of being diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2005, he continued to work with the senior squad under Steve McClaren, Fabio Capello and Roy Hodgson, as well as the Under-21s with Stuart Pearce, before retiring in 2013.

He finally succumbed to the disease that he had been living with for 15 years in November aged 72, and is survived by his wife Veronica, daughters Sarah and Julie, and his son Stephen, a former midfielder and current first-team coach at Newcastle United.

Coach...Clemence worked with England's goalkeepers for several years

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid)	9
Edouard Mendy (Chelsea)	5
Gianluigi Donnarumma (Milan)	3
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	2
Andrea Consigli (Sassuolo)	1
Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid)	1
Alex Remiro (Real Sociedad)	1
Koen Casteels (Wolfsburg)	1
David De Gea (Manchester United)	1
David Marshall (Derby County)	1
Hugo Lloris (Tottenham Hotspur)	1

DEFENDERS

Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	13
Angelino (RB Leipzig)	7
Benjamin Pavard (Bayern Munich)	5
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	5
Andy Robertson (Liverpool)	5
Theo Hernandez (Milan)	4
Kieran Trippier (Atletico Madrid)	4
Kurt Zouma (Chelsea)	4
Ben Chilwell (Chelsea)	4
Jose Gimenez (Atletico Madrid)	4
David Alaba (Bayern Munich)	3
Thiago Silva (Chelsea)	3
Stefan Savic (Atletico Madrid)	3
Juan Cuadrado (Juventus)	3
Simon Kjaer (Milan)	3
Thomas Meunier (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Danilo (Juventus)	2
Reece James (Chelsea)	2
Sergio Reguillon (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)	1
Jordan Amavi (Marseille)	1
Cala (Cadiz)	1
Joao Cancelo (Manchester City)	1
Dodo (Shakhtar Donetsk)	1
Jose Fonte (Lille)	1
Nicolas Gavory (Standard Liege)	1
Lucas Hernandez (Bayern Munich)	1
Michael Keane (Everton)	1
Pepe (Porto)	1
Francesco Acerbi (Lazio)	1
Toby Alderweireld (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Dedryck Boyata (Hertha Berlin)	1
Sebastian Coates (Sporting)	1
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	1
Eric Dier (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Jean-Kevin Duverne (Brest)	1
Raphael Guerreiro (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Mario Hermoso (Atletico Madrid)	1
Joules Kounde (Sevilla)	1
Chancel Mbemba (Porto)	1
Alessio Romagnoli (Milan)	1
Pau Torres (Villarreal)	1
Kyle Walker (Manchester City)	1

MIDFIELDERS

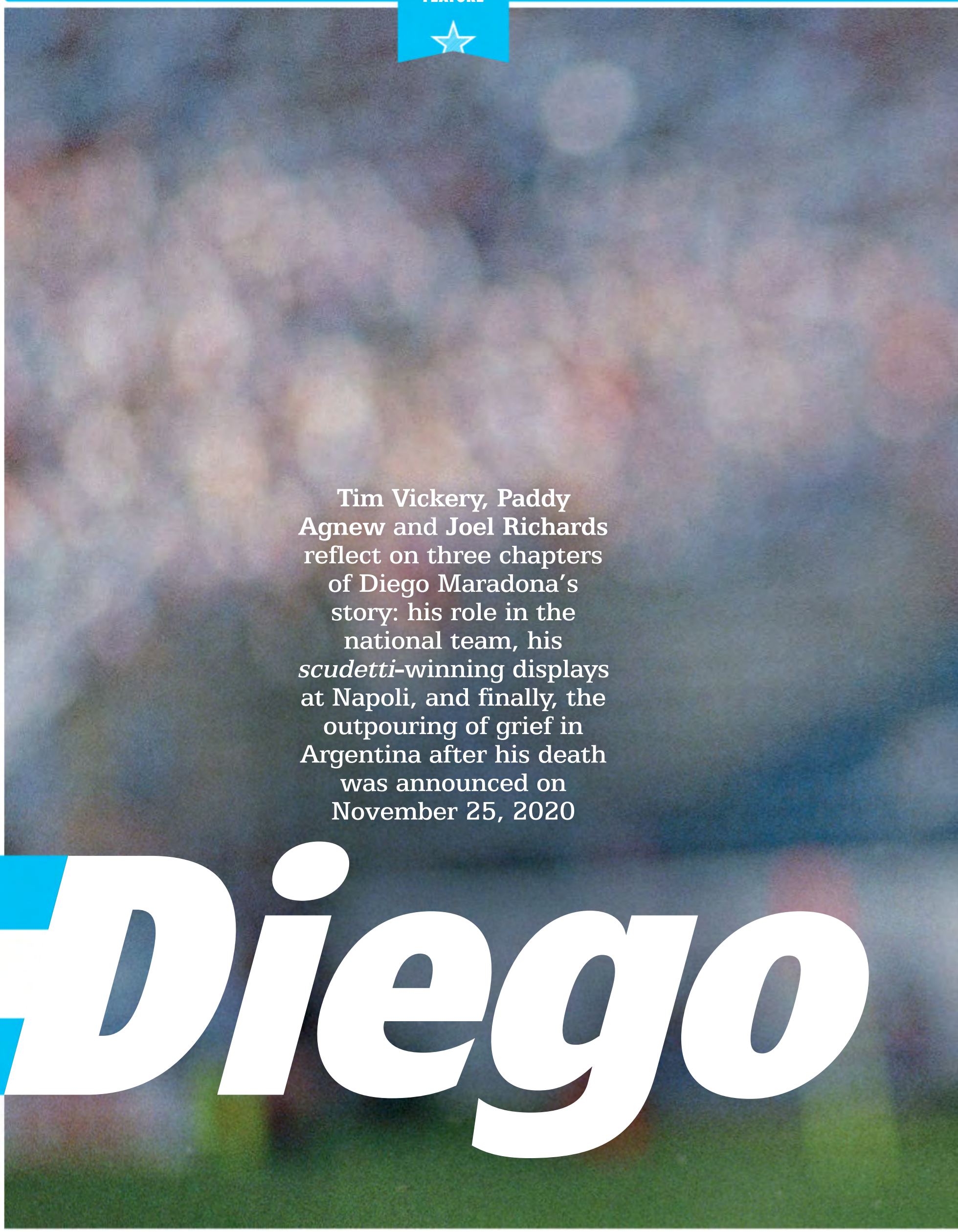
Son Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	11
Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United)	8
Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City)	7
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	7
Mikel Oyarzabal (Real Sociedad)	6
Diogo Jota (Liverpool)	5
Mikel Merino (Real Sociedad)	4
Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich)	2
Kingsley Coman (Bayern Munich)	2
David Silva (Real Sociedad)	2
Max Kruse (Union Berlin)	2
James Rodriguez (Everton)	2
Jonathan Bamba (Lille)	1
Ismael Bennacer (Milan)	1
Casemiro (Real Madrid)	1
Phil Foden (Manchester City)	1
Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City)	1
Franck Kessie (Milan)	1
Davy Klaassen (Ajax)	1
Toni Kroos (Real Madrid)	1
Manuel Locatelli (Sassuolo)	1
Sergej Milinkovic-Savic (Lazio)	1
Luka Modric (Real Madrid)	1
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	1
Dani Olmo (RB Leipzig)	1
Domenico Berardi (Sassuolo)	1
Papu Gomez (Atalanta)	1

Jack Grealish (Aston Villa)	1
N'Golo Kante (Chelsea)	1
Koke (Atletico Madrid)	1
Riyad Mahrez (Manchester City)	1
Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Roma)	1
Mason Mount (Chelsea)	1
Leandro Paredes (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Lars Stindl (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Yusuf Yazici (Lille)	1

FORWARDS

Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)	20
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)	14
Erling Haaland (Borussia Dortmund)	11
Joao Felix (Atletico Madrid)	7
Harry Kane (Tottenham Hotspur)	5
Kylian Mbappe (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus)	2
Romelu Lukaku (Internazionale)	2
Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	2
Ciro Immobile (Lazio)	2
Alvaro Morata (Juventus)	1
Dominic Calvert-Lewin (Everton)	1
Marcus Rashford (Manchester United)	1
Kevin Volland (Monaco)	1
Burak Yılmaz (Lille)	1
Hakim Ziyech (Chelsea)	1

ESM MEMBERS: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport Express* (Russia), *Sport/Foot* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *TIPS Bladet* (Denmark), *ElfVoetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)



Tim Vickery, Paddy Agnew and Joel Richards reflect on three chapters of Diego Maradona's story: his role in the national team, his *scudetti*-winning displays at Napoli, and finally, the outpouring of grief in Argentina after his death was announced on November 25, 2020

Diego

AFA
C

Part one: THE WORLD CUPS

Tim Vickery reflects on Diego Maradona's very different roles at four very different World Cups

When the news broke that Diego Maradona had died, most of the Argentine press illustrated the story with a recent photo. But that Maradona, the 21st-century version, will surely start to fade from the collective memory. Immortalised will be the Maradona of Mexico '86, Diego at the peak of his powers, reaching a level of play in the closing stages of the competition that may never have been seen before or since.

1986 may well have been the last truly great World Cup, the final one that was seen as the outstanding measure of quality, before the juggernaut of European club football became the game's main event. It was a tournament full of stars and surprises, from Michael Laudrup and Michel Platini to Gary Lineker, Igor Belanov and Emilio Butragueno. But what Maradona did brooked no comparison. He took on sub-standard pitches and brutal defending to give an exhibition of the game so complete that whenever great players met, they were in awe of him. He was the idol of the idols.

That 1986 triumph came more than nine years after his Argentina debut, when he was not far past his 16th birthday. Then coach Cesar Luis Menotti concluded that he was too raw to deal with the pressures of a World Cup at home, and left him out of the 1978 squad. A year later, in June 1979, he had his first international goal in his ninth game – against Scotland at Hampden Park – where the home crowd even booed the possession of their own team because they wanted to see more of the wonderkid. And then he was the outstanding player as Argentina won the 1979 Under-20 World Cup, igniting hopes that he could do the same at senior level three years later.

In the event, Spain 1982 had to be chalked down to experience. He came up with some dazzling moments. But it all proved too much; the pressure, the constant fouling, the frustration of feeling the title slip away combined to cause him to snap, and he was sent off for an ugly foul against Brazil. And, as he then moved to Europe, it was almost three years before he played for his country again.

The build up to Mexico '86 was difficult. Argentina had missed out on Mexico '70, and for a while there were fears that history might repeat itself. The team were unconvincing in qualification. There was a power struggle behind the scenes, with 1978 captain and centre-back Daniel Passarella replaced as

Spain '82...kicked

Mexico '86... champion

Italia '90...finalist

team leader by Maradona. Indeed, rumours have persisted that Passarella was poisoned to ensure that he could not take his place in the starting line-up.

But in the course of the competition, it all came together. During the tournament, coach Carlos Bilardo unleashed his secret weapon – a back three system that allowed him to pack the midfield to stifle the opposition and give Maradona a platform. Behind Real Madrid centre-forward Jorge Valdano, Maradona was able to wander free, always looking to combine and then launching his solo surges.

It was too much for the England defence in that fateful quarter-final, the day that did so much to define Diego Maradona. From the Argentine point of view, this was a rivalry that went much deeper than the war in the South Atlantic just four years earlier. Their country had been an informal part of the British Empire – and for those on the weaker end of a neo-colonial relationship, what Maradona did acted out a profound national fantasy.

The first, notorious "Hand of God" goal sent a message that while the English had the power, the Argentines were smarter and could use native cunning to get by. The magnificent solo second was a declaration that the Argentines were simply better.

His performance in the semi-final against Belgium was even more astonishing. And though it has been underestimated, his display in the final against West Germany was the definitive proof of his greatness.

"What impresses me particularly about him," said England legend Bobby Moore on the eve of the game, "is that he has a profound knowledge of what is required of him. He doesn't get carried away with the idea of trying to do it all on his own." And Maradona did Moore proud. The Germans deployed Lothar Matthaus to man mark him. And Maradona was content to be a decoy, to drag his marker all over the field and create space for others. And he capped his afternoon by splitting the defence with a pass that put Jorge Burruchaga through to score the winning goal. His individual genius was always placed at the service of the collective.

> The notorious "Hand of God" goal sent a message that the Argentines were smarter and more cunning…the magnificent solo second was a declaration that they were simply better

Once he had climbed the summit, he stayed there for a while with Napoli. But by the time the next World Cup came round, he was starting to show the wear and tear. His body had taken a terrible pummeling – it is entirely possible that his cocaine addiction was born in a quest to blot out the physical pain – and he struggled through Italia '90 on damaged ankles. Even so, he still came up with enough moments of inspiration – most notably the dribble against Brazil – to carry an ordinary side to the final.

That should have been the end of the story. His life was sliding into disarray, he picked up a ban for testing positive for cocaine and he left Napoli. He played a couple of friendlies at the start of 1993, one of them to celebrate the centenary of the Argentine FA, and it had the air of a farewell.

But then Argentina got themselves in trouble in qualification for USA '94, even losing 5-0 at home to Colombia. The call came out – bring back the saviour. His country pleaded, and he could not say no. He was unable to resist the challenge. But, bloated and unfit, he was not in the slightest physical condition to play in a fourth World Cup. So he took a short cut – perhaps unwittingly, under dubious medical supervision – and was thrown out of the tournament after testing positive for a cocktail of weight reducers.

It was a sad way to end. But there was some consolation. This was not like the case of sprinter Ben Johnson, where the drug had been the performance, Diego's offence was much less severe. He took an illegal fast track to get in shape and show off a standard of play that, even in those 1994 games against Greece and Nigeria, has rarely been seen in subsequent World Cups.

Tim Vickery

USA '94...disgraced

Part two: NAPOLI & SERIE A

Paddy Agnew looks back on the highs and lows of Maradona's time in Italy

The first time that the Maradona effect in Italy really struck home was on a Monday morning back in November 1985.

The day before, Diego had scored a wonderful free-kick to record an historic 1-0 win for Napoli over northern giants Juventus. This writer had just arrived in Italy to cover Serie A. That Monday morning, on the streets of Rome, it was impossible to walk more than a few blocks without seeing fans attempting to re-enact the free-kick: the stabbed, billiard-like left-footed shot with which he had scored an indirect free-kick in the penalty area from an impossible-looking position. Impossible that is, for anyone but Diego Maradona.

The love story between Diego and Italy had begun.

Over the next six years, his descent into a drug-induced hell eventually brought a premature halt to his fabulous career. Yet Naples stood by him despite everything. They were on his side then, and they still are now.

In December 1986, the San Paolo stadium (now called the Diego Armando Maradona stadium in his memory) hosted a press conference after a 2-1 win over Como. Huge media corps stood around waiting impatiently for Diego. Finally he arrived, surrounded by a scrimmage of handlers, PR agents and hangers-on. Neapolitan journalists eagerly surged forward to get the great man's quotes.

Or at least, so it seemed. But no, they rushed forward to shake his hand, to hug him and to kiss him. It became clear that much of the Neapolitan media had made a pact with Diego: keep us top of the table and we will turn a blind eye to your "exotic" lifestyle, intermittent training and questionable (mafia) friendships.

By the time he left Italy in 1991 however, stealing out like a thief in the night in the wake of a post-match positive test for cocaine, that attitude had changed. Even at the previous year's Italia '90 World Cup, Diego and Argentina had been roundly booed at both the inaugural game in Milan (a 1-0 defeat to Cameroon) and at the final (lost 1-0 to West Germany) in Rome.

The late Peter Ball of *The Times* once said that perhaps there had never been a less admired, less respected "great" player than Maradona. He was right and he was wrong.

For some, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, he was a cheat, best summed up by that infamous "Hand of God" goal in Mexico. For others, especially in Naples, it was Diego's second goal that day, a goal that had previously been scored only by *Roy of the Rovers* in a comic strip. For them he was a quasi-divine creature.

While some fans and journalists have argued over Maradona's legacy, amongst his peer group there is no debate. The guys who played with and against him in Serie A still hold an inordinately high opinion of him. When Paolo Maldini, a great player and a model professional if ever there was one, was in his last season in 2009, he was asked the classic question – who was the best player he had played against? He smiled and said: "That is easy – Diego of course. He was so talented."

Maldini went on to call Maradona a totally honest player on the field. No whining to the referee, no matter how much he got kicked (and he got kicked a lot), said Maldini, he just got up and got on with it. Many others have made the same point since his death, including Liam Brady, Fulvio Collovati, Bruno Conti, Ciro Ferrara and more.

As for being little-loved during his playing days, this was just not so. When Diego led Napoli to their first-ever title success on a hot day in May 1987, it was a day of redemption for the oft-maligned city. Not since the Allied troops liberated the city in September 1943 had there been such good reason to celebrate.

Diego did an exhaustive lap of honour that afternoon. All lit up, he stood in front of the crowd, with that famous barrel chest defiantly thrust forward as he blew kisses at the wildly enthusiastic, 82,000-strong crowd. This was the King of Naples, paying and receiving tribute from his loyal subjects who would do anything for him. 33 years later, they still would.

In some senses, of course, Naples was, at the same time, the best and the worst possible place for Diego. It was the best because of the love at first sight between him and Napoli fans. The natural empathy between the poor boy from the Buenos Aires suburb of Villa Fiorito and Neapolitans was too strong. Both were urchins from the poor south, both had spent their lives with compatriots looking down their noses at them.

Yet it was the worst place because, with the greatest global icon in contemporary football on their doorstep, the Neapolitan mafia, the *Camorra*, were always going to look for a slice of the action sooner or later. They duly did through one of the city's most powerful (and vicious) families, the Giuliano clan. He supplied them with social consensus; they supplied him with cocaine.

Despite all that, as someone privileged to have seen him play often, I can only thank the sporting Gods for Maradona. As Argentinians put it: "It doesn't matter what you did with your life, Diego. What matters is what you did for ours".

> Naples was, at the same time, the best and the worst possible place for Diego Maradona

Paddy Agnew

Paddy Agnew is the author of *Forza Italia*, a reflection on Italian football in the '80s and '90s, with particular reference to Maradona

Part Three: ARGENTINA SAYS FAREWELL

Joel Richards on the reaction to Maradona's death in Argentina

"There is only one Diego," said Carlos Tevez, a week after Maradona died. "Diego is God."

Tevez, one of the many Argentine players to have once been labelled "The Next Maradona", had just scored Boca Juniors' winning goal in the first leg of the Copa Libertadores tie with Brazil's Internacional. The club captain controlled the ball in the area, swivelled and scored, and then as the team celebrated, lifted his No.10 shirt to reveal *the* shirt once worn by the number ten. *El Diez*.

It was the shirt that up until then Tevez had admired as it hung on the wall at his home. It is the one Maradona wore in the memorable 3-0 win over River Plate at the Bombonera in 1981. The grainy footage shows a virtually unplayable Maradona. Only the kicks and shoves of Daniel Passarella and Alberto Tarantini could stop him. Maradona capped that performance with one of his most iconic goals in Argentine football – receiving a cross inside the area, feinting, leaving 1978 World Cup winning goalkeeper Ubaldo Fillol on his knees, before passing the ball coolly into the net.

Mural...street art of Maradona in Buenos Aires

Tevez's tribute in the days after Maradona's death mirrored Lionel Messi's – both raised their shirt after scoring to reveal one once worn by their idol. And both players sought a moment for themselves, away from their team-mates, for a private, intimate tribute. But the outpouring of grief in Argentina was, and still is, anything but private.

The Bombonera, where Maradona dazzled crowds in the 1980s and then years later would be seen in his private box at games, was just one of the places transformed into an altar after the news broke, people leaving flowers, pictures and messages. The government decreed three days mourning. "Diego will be one of those people who never dies," said president Alberto Fernandez.

Authorities expected a million people at the wake, held at the *Casa Rosada*. Between those who queued for hours under the hot Buenos Aires sun and

Casa Rosada...the office of the president of Argentina

Man of the people...millions of supporters gathered to pay their respects to Diego

Devastated...many fans have shed tears

those who lined the route of the funeral procession, it must have been more.

"There is great sadness," said Marcelo, the artist painting a street mural of a young Maradona on the day of the wake, "but it is also a celebration." There were chants about the English, there were songs in Italian, there were drums, fireworks, and there were tears. "Football has died," said one man in his sixties.

Perhaps only for Maradona does such hyperbole fit. There to say goodbye to Maradona were people of all ages, people of all backgrounds. Maradona was a footballer, a global superstar who led Argentina to win the World Cup. And then he transformed into something much larger, much greater. Amid the controversies, the excess, the addiction, was the rebellious and roguish cultural icon. He had Che Guevara and Fidel Castro tattoos, but countless people sport Maradona tattoos.

The poster for one of the many documentaries about *El Diez* illustrates his many incarnations. *Amando Maradona*, (*Loving Maradona*, a play on his middle name) features a classic team photo taken seconds before kick-off. The 11 players are all Maradona at different stages of his life – from the innocent youngster whose dream was to play in a World Cup, through the 1986 and 1990 captain, to the died hair, the ballooning stomach, and then the slimmed down version of Maradona who hosted his own TV programme *La Noche del Diez* some years ago.

In his final job in football, Maradona took charge of Gimnasia for 21 games, spending the last year of his life receiving a hero's welcome in stadiums all around the country. His final away match as coach, fittingly, was against Boca in the Bombonera.

> "Diego will be one of those people who never dies"
>
> Argentina president Alberto Fernandez

"What do I care what Maradona did with his life," reads the quote attributed to the late Argentine cartoonist and writer Roberto Fontanarrosa, and which points to how many people here feel about *El Diego*. "I care about what he did for mine."

Maradona meant so many things to different people in Argentina and around the world, so the reports of his depression and loneliness in his final days make for sad reading. In his final public appearance as Gimnasia coach he had barely been able to walk without help. Those close to him have said he simply no longer felt like Maradona.

As this magazine went to print, just over a week after Diego Maradona's death, 1986 World Cup-winning coach Carlos Bilardo had still not been told of Maradona's passing. Bilardo, now aged 82, is suffering poor health and his family was shielding him from the news. A group of ex-players including centre-back Oscar Ruggeri were expected to tell Bilardo, who considered Maradona "the son I never had."

Hero's welcome... Maradona returned to the Bombonera back in March

Tribute...Tevez revealed the shirt after scoring against Internacional

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What was your overall opinion of the 1986 World Cup?
It was a World Cup of football. Unlike 1982 in Spain, which was a World Cup of bruises. I was particularly excited by the match between France and Brazil. I just didn't want it to finish I enjoyed watching it so much. A pity one of them had to be eliminated. In fact, I thought Brazil had a very good World Cup despite all the criticism they got back home. I thought they deserved to reach the final.

Which players did you most enjoy watching in Mexico?
I liked Michael Laudrup of Denmark in particular and also Enzo Scifo – though I thought the Belgians used him in much too deep a position, at least against us I'm glad to say! Zbigniew Boniek is a player I have always admired greatly in Italy but he did not have a good World Cup. I think he was tired after a hard season with Roma. As for Michel Platini, he wasn't at his best either. Of course he must rank among the finest players of our generation, but I think his era is over.

What was Argentina's great strength in winning the tournament?
Team spirit. In 1982 we had a lot of individual stars. Excellent footballers, very famous and with international reputations. We just took it all too easily. The squad this time was one which contained a lot of players who wanted to make their names – they had that hunger to do well. Most were stars in Argentina but virtually unknown anywhere else. They were battling for themselves and that worked well for the team. Simply we played better.

What did it mean to you and Argentina to win the World Cup?
It was an unforgettable day for Argentine football and the greatest day of my career – to have won the most important trophy of all, by defeating first-class opposition. I have to admit I thought after we had won about all the people who had said and written unkind things. Then I thought of my mother and my father – and my brother Lalo, who was trying to get to me with tears of joy running down his face. What did I have to be bitter about?

What about the goal you "handled" in the quarter-final against England?
That's a matter for the referee. If he had seen something wrong it was up to him to stop the game. It was an accident of play, something which has not happened only to me, either. Ask Zico or Platini or Rummenigge. They will all tell you that they have scored a goal with their hand at some time or another.

How were you affected by the welcome home you received in Buenos Aires?
Such a multitude of people and all of us in tears! When I went to my parents' home the crowds almost knocked the doors down. When the president invited me to the Casa Rosada and I stood on the balcony...I felt like the president! No, seriously, I felt very close to the fans.

Do you believe you are now the world's No. 1 player?
No, I don't like to think about things like that. I know I'm not the world's worst but you will never find me saying I'm the best. If other people choose to say so, that is their business. One day Platini is the king, the next day it's Rummenigge and the next day Elkjaer. They are all superb players. How can you compare them? It's just not realistic.

But other players now look up to you. Doesn't that have an impression on you?
I don't like to hear about being a "leader" or a "*caudillo*" as they say in Argentine football. I believe only in those who are examples. Like Daniel Passarella, who is an exemplary team-mate. I don't believe in the sort of players who make a great show on the pitch so the fans can see they are the most important. Football is a team game and you must treat everyone as one more member of the team.

Now you have won the World Cup, what is your next ambition?
In football there is always the next match, the next target. In my case it is to win the Italian championship with Napoli. I dream of achieving that before I leave Italian football. I'm not saying we WILL win it. I am saying I desperately want to win it. We do need to win something this season. The fans have been very patient but now we owe it to them.

Many footballers have said that it is impossible to play in Napoli because of the volatility of the fans and the city.
I think that's exaggerated. The Napoli supporters are very passionate about their football, but so were the fans in Barcelona. I can live with that. Better that than the other way round. When I'm no longer happy there I'll go. But I've certainly no plans to go right now!

And after Napoli?
When the World Cup was over the president of Napoli phoned me to say he wanted me to stay with the club until the end of my playing career. He even asked me what money I would want to make such a commitment. But I'm not ready for that. For example, there was an inquiry from an English club – yes, people say Tottenham Hotspur but again that's not for me to comment – and at one time I would not have ruled out the possibility of going there. But now it is unlikely. I wouldn't mind playing in Brazil. I like their style of football and I have a lot of friends there. But ultimately I would really like to finish my career back with Boca Juniors.

You spent two controversial seasons with Barcelona. Do you regret playing in Spain?
No, I went to Spain determined to do well and I left only because of the Barcelona president, Jose Luis Nunez. You know, if the offer was good enough I might even play for Real Madrid...I said once that I could never wear their colours. But that was before I had my problems with Nunez! Having said that, I have never received an offer from Madrid – either direct or indirect.

While at Barcelona you were badly injured by that notorious foul by Andoni Goikoetxea of Athletic Bilbao. What are your views on that now?
Again, it's history. Nothing can change what happened. I have to say I believe Goikoetxea has always been overrated in Spain. After the World Cup defeat by Belgium, some of the Spanish directors said to me that they lost because Goikoetxea couldn't play. But I never rated him as the sort of player to turn a game. Butragueno, yes. He plays on the side of angels – like Lineker and Careca. Those are the players I like to watch. That's the sort of football I like.

"You will never find me saying I'm the best"

In tribute to football great Diego Maradona, we revisit his interviews with *World Soccer's* Rino Landa and Keir Radnedge in 1986 after he won the World Cup and World Player of the Year

Lee Dong-gook

Striker finally calls time on a fascinating and eventful career

Lee Dong-gook's career had more ups and downs than the mountain-covered Korean peninsula. The record goalscorer in both the K League and Asian Champions League had plenty of heartbreak along the way, and still found time to become a reality TV star.

Ironically, it was the lowest point that propelled Lee, now 41, to achieve so much. In 1998 – as a teenager – he helped Pohang Steelers win the Asian Club Championship, and followed that with a call-up to the World Cup squad. Two years later, he was top scorer as South Korea finished third at the Asian Cup, with his career going from strength to strength. It was a huge surprise, then, when Guus Hiddink left him out for the 2002 tournament on home soil.

"Many Korea fans thought I should have been in the squad and so did I," Lee said in 2020. "In hindsight, that was the one big reason why I shouldn't have been called up. I tried hard but I was so arrogant and I failed to get into the squad. I talked a lot to the Korean media and wandered from place to place. I was shocked by the decision and started to hate football."

The co-hosts reached the semi-final but Lee did not join the frenzy. "I was in Korea but I did not watch a single World Cup game. Instead, I drank a lot of alcohol in an attempt to numb the pain."

Not only did his former team-mates earn praise and plaudits, they also secured exemption from military service. Meanwhile, Lee had to join up a few months later. The army, however, was the making of him.

"There, Lee Dong-gook's second life began," he said. "I got mentally strong and humble. I think I would not be where I am if I had made the World Cup squad in 2002. Before that, I leaned on my natural talent and ability but then I realised how much hard work it took to make it at a professional level and started to redouble my efforts."

That made "The Lion King" (a nickname derived from an early mullet-like hairstyle) Korea's leading man once again. In 2006 he was in the form of his life and all set for the World Cup, but a cruciate ligament injury ruled him out of action just weeks before the tournament in Germany began.

> "I was in Korea but I did not watch a single World Cup game. Instead, I drank a lot of alcohol in an attempt to numb the pain"

It was more heartbreak, but at least there was the compensation of a move to the Premier League. Lee finally returned to the pitch as a late substitute for Middlesbrough against Reading in February 2007, and with virtually his first competitive touch in ten months, hit the post.

If that had gone in, perhaps things could have been different. Instead, he failed to score a league goal for Boro, was quickly – and understandably – labelled a "flop" by the English media and returned to South Korea in 2008 for a short stint at Seongnam FC, then the most successful team in K League history.

In 2009, he moved to Jeonbuk Motors who, at the time, had never won a league title. Now they have eight, surpassing Seongnam as the league's most successful club, and Lee has played a major role. The first title came in his first season, and the last came on the final day of the 2020 campaign as he hung up his boots.

By the time Lee collected his eighth championship medal in November, he had scored 228 goals – more than anyone else in the league's 38-year history. In 2016 he won the Asian Champions League, and has since become the competition's most prolifiic player with 37 strikes, in spite of the fact that he didn't appear in the tournament until his thirties.

He did eventually return to the World Cup in 2010, but failed to make an impact and was overlooked for the 2014 edition. In 2017 he retired with 105 caps and 33 goals to his name.

The nation had already taken Lee back to its heart before he became the star of reality television show, *The Return of Superman* in 2015, where he looked after his five children (in a country with the lowest birth-rate in the world, this is worthy of note).

But first and foremost, he was a fine footballer with a memorable career that lasted over 20 years. "I got to hoist the trophy on my last day, and this was just the kind of happy ending that I'd dreamed about."

John Duerden

Send off...Lee won the K League in his final season

Rising star...in 2000 Lee scored eight goals in just ten games for South Korea, aged 21

Bodo/Glimt

With a small budget and an innovative approach, the unfancied northerners have run away with the Norwegian league title

With a population of 5.3 million, Norway is not a big country. It is, however, a long country. If you stand on Norway's most southern point you are about as close to the country's most northern point of Nordkapp as you are to Rome or Kiev. The two most northern counties in Norway, Nordland and Troms og Finmark, make up about 35 per cent of Norway's mainland landmass, but only 462,000 of the country's 5.3 million inhabitants live there. Driving from Oslo to Bodo, the biggest city in the north, will take you 16 hours.

With geography like this, a cultural divide is inevitable, and this extends to football. The first attempt at a national Norwegian football league was started in 1937, yet it wasn't until 1972 that a team from the north was admitted to the top division. This wasn't due to a lack of interest, but logistical challenges and a suspicion that northern teams would not be able to compete.

Bodo/Glimt were at the forefront of changing that perception, winning the Norwegian Cup in 1975 and reaching the final in 1977. They would win the cup again in 1993 and finish runners-up in the top division in 1977, 1993, 2003 and 2019. This is already an admirable set of achievements for a team from a city of just over 50,000 people, situated well inside the Arctic Circle. But neither Bodo/Glimt – nor any other team from the north – had ever managed to actually win the league.

This is the historical backdrop to one of 2020's greatest sporting fairy tales: Bodo/Glimt, who were in the second tier as recently as 2017, have become the first team from the north of Norway to claim a league title. And they've done so in an extraordinary manner: the title was secured on November 22, with five games remaining. At that point, Glimt had won 22, drawn two and lost once. They had scored 85 goals, averaging 3.4 per game. And they've done it on a wage budget that's less than a quarter of what Rosenborg spent on salaries last season. Norway has never seen anything like it.

Conventional wisdom suggested that after shocking the league and finishing second last season, "little" Bodo/Glimt would have their squad picked apart and fade away. The first part happened to an extent. Breakout star Hakon Evjen departed for Dutch side AZ Alkmaar, while Tunisia winger Amor Layouni was sold to Pyramids FC in Egypt. But Glimt most emphatically did not fade away. Some of the money raised by those transfers was reinvested, with Danish striker Kasper Junker arriving for less than a fifth of the reported €2.5m fee the club received for Evjen. Junker joined fellow Dane Philip Zinckernagel, already at Glimt, as two of only a handful of foreign players in the squad.

Winners...players celebrate after sealing the title against Stromsgodset

> "At the beginning of 2019, we decided to not focus on results at all, which I think almost all clubs in the world do"
>
> **Bodo/Glimt midfielder, Patrick Berg**

The team's core is Norwegian, with an emphasis on local talent. Midfield orchestrator Patrick Berg is from a family of Bodo/Glimt players: his father and two uncles played for the club in the 1990s, and his grandfather was a star of the side that won the cup in 1975 and is considered one of the greatest Norwegian players of all time, winning 43 international caps.

Other local stars included 21-year-old winger Jens Petter Hauge – who departed for Milan after scoring against them in a Europa League qualifier in September – as well as left-back Fredrik Andre Bjorkan, son of sporting director Aasmund Bjorkan, who himself played over 200 times for Glimt.

Goal king...Kasper Junker scored 19 goals in his first 20 games to seal the title, including the winner against Stromsgodset

Aside from a cluster of foreign bargains and a core of local players, the squad is made up of Norwegians largely recruited from the lower league.

Tactically, coach Kjetil Knutsen has taken their traditional 4-3-3 and added some notable elements, including an extremely high press and defensive line. Knutsen also encourages centre-backs to bring the ball out from defence, something most Norwegian clubs avoid.

The club has brought in former fighter pilot Bjorn Mannsverk as a "mentality coach", while the squad have collectively embraced meditation as a tool to help them focus. According to midfielder Berg, the key to getting results has been to not think about results. "At the beginning of 2019, we decided to not focus on results at all, which I think almost all clubs in the world do", he told *TV2*. "We never think 'Oh no, we're 1-0 down'. It doesn't affect us at all. We only think about our own performance, and we know how to perform. That's what we focus on."

Not focussing on results and not spending money may seem like an unusual way for a club to achieve success in modern football, but it's hard to argue with the results. Players will no doubt leave for bigger clubs in bigger leagues, but Bodo/Glimt have already made history and added their name to world football's rich tapestry of impossible underdog stories.

Lars Sivertsen

Sassuolo

Italian underdogs flying high in Serie A

On the first weekend of this Serie A season, as Sassuolo prepared to kick off their campaign at home to Cagliari, *Sky TV* pundit and former Juventus and Italy player, Giancarlo Marocchi teasingly asked the Sassuolo sports director Giovanni Carnevali: "So how big a bonus will your players get if they can avoid relegation?"

Standing pitch side as the players warmed up behind him, Carnevali smiled and said: "Look, this is our eighth year in Serie A and we've never offered our players a bonus for staying up...what I will say though is that there is a bonus, not just for the Europa League but also for the Champions League, because a club like this has to be ambitious."

To some observers those might have sounded like high-flying words; maybe too high-flying. Yet, two months and eight Serie A games later, "little" Sassuolo were proudly standing second in the Serie A table, two points behind leaders Milan, one clear of Roma and two clear of reigning champions Juventus.

Most football fans would probably have difficulty identifying the town of Sassuolo on a map of Italy. Situated in the hard-working industrial region of Emilia Romagna, until recently this 40,000-population town was better known for the manufacture of ceramics and tiles than for its football team. In the last decade, though, that has changed.

Last summer Sassuolo celebrated their 100th anniversary but the reality of their last 100 years is that they have been largely played out in the relative obscurity of Italy's lower divisions, from Emilia regional leagues up to the amateur Serie D level and all the way up from there. It was only in the summer of 2013, under the guidance of coach Eusebio De Francesco, that Sassuolo finally made the breakthrough to Serie A.

The point about that, though, as Carnevali underlined in his pitch-side interview, is that since 2013, when the smallest town ever to play in Serie A was the feel-good story of the summer, Sassuolo have remained in the top division of Italian football, risking relegation only once. That happened in that first-ever Serie A season which began with four straight defeats, including a 7-0 away drubbing by Internazionale.

During that topsy-turvy season, coach Di Francesco was even sacked at the end of January 2014 as the club languished in the relegation zone. However, after his replacement, former Parma coach Alberto Malesani, lost five games in a row, Di Francesco was hurriedly re-installed in early March, going on to take the club to an historic second last-day *salvezza* with a 4-2 win over Genoa.

Since then, Sassuolo have consistently returned respectable lower-table placings, with their sixth-place finish in the 2015-2016 season their best-ever result. That earned them a Europa League campaign, which began with a preliminary round qualification against Red Star Belgrade, but ended badly with successive defeats by Athletic Bilbao and Genk in their last two group games. Still, Sassuolo had made their mark.

Flying high...Manuel Locatelli was on target in the win over Napoli

> It is still early days in this highly abnormal, COVID-dominated season, yet all the indications suggest that Sassuolo could be in for a good season

It is still early days in this highly abnormal, COVID-dominated season, yet all the indications suggest that Sassuolo could be in for a good season. Asked about the club's prospects on Italian state radio recently, sports director Carnevali sounded a realistic note, saying: "We're well aware of the good moment but we've got to keep our feet on the ground...knowing that we can have a very good season because we have an excellent team."

So, where did this "excellent team" come from? The answer is the late Giorgio Squinzi, for long the CEO of multinational building materials

Bright coach... Roberto De Zerbi

Veteran...Caputo scored on his Italy debut in October

company, Mapei. Squinzi, who died in 2019, inherited from his father not only a thriving family business but also a passion for sport that saw him sponsor the Mapei professional cycling team for ten years.

Disillusioned by widespread doping practises, Squinzi eventually abandoned cycling in the early noughties only to return to Sassuolo, a local team that he had sponsored in the '80s. Squinzi not only provided the firepower to push the club up the road to Serie A but, in 2013, he also bought the privately-owned Giglio Stadium in Reggio Emilio, naming it the Mapei Stadium. As a result, Sassuolo are one of a small number of Italian clubs (Juventus is the most famous other) that own their stadium.

The Mapei Stadium and Sassuolo both enjoyed a significant coming of age in mid-November when they played host to Italy's impressive 2-0 Nations League win over Poland. Two of the best Italians on the night were the Sassuolo pair, midfielder Manuel Locatelli and striker Domenico Berardi, scorer of the second goal. (Two other Sassuolo players, striker Ciccio Caputo and Gian Marco Ferrari were also in the squad).

All four are key elements in a Sassuolo squad, led by one of Italian football's brightest younger coaches, 41-year-old Roberto De Zerbi, who plays bold, attacking football, as witnessed in their 2-0 away win against Napoli in early November.

The Sassuolo story, however, is based not only on good players and a good coach but also on good husbandry, thanks to the support of both Mapei and the Squinzi family. Not for nothing, Sassuolo have balanced the books, returning a profit for the last four financial years. Add to that excellent infrastructure in the shape of a state-of-the-art training centre and a club-owned stadium, and their success begins to make sense.

Sassuolo are not going to win Serie A, at least not yet. However, qualification for the Europa League is not an impossibility whilst, at the very least, they are sure to take a few prestigious Serie A scalps before the season is over.

Paddy Agnew

Pitso Mosimane

New job for one of African football's trailblazers

Coaching in North Africa, or throughout the Arabic-speaking world for that matter, is not for the faint of heart, or those in search of job security. Results and success are all that matters and failure to provide instant gratification usually means a quick exit. Even the perennially successful clubs have an extraordinarily high turnover of coaches, including Africa's most successful side Al Ahly.

They have had 18 coaching changes over the last decade, even while winning continental titles and continuing to dominate domestic competitions. Coaches are Egyptian, European or South American, but the Cairo giants have now broken with their long-standing preference and employed the South African Pitso Mosimane.

He is the first black African coach in more than a century at the Egyptian club in what is not only a unique step for Al Ahly, but also massively symbolic. Mosimane signed in September just weeks after securing a fifth South African league title in seven years with Mamelodi Sundowns. He became his country's most successful coach in the process after a season in which the club also did the treble by taking both major domestic cups (FA Cup and League Cup) too.

New challenge... Pitso Mosimane

The 56-year-old grew up in Soweto amid the tumult and chaos of the struggle against apartheid. He started as a teenage striker at Jomo Cosmos and Sundowns before moving to Greek club Ionikos.

Outgoing, inquisitive and with something of a chip on his shoulder, he has been in perpetual search of success, although sadly just past his prime when South Africa returned to international football. He scored on his debut but managed just four caps in 1993-94. He later played in Qatar and Belgium, before returning home to coach juniors at various clubs, later becoming Bruce Grobbelaar's assistant at SuperSport United.

When the Liverpool icon was sacked in 2001, Mosimane took over and quickly impressed, winning a handful of cup trophies and spotting promising talent. In 2006 he was identified as a future national team coach and appointed assistant to Carlos Alberto Parreira, brought in to take charge of South Africa when they hosted the 2010 World Cup.

Mosimane replaced the Brazilian after that tournament but was fired after a poor start to the 2014 qualifying campaign. Back at Sundowns, he moulded together – with the benefit of unlimited resources from owner, the mining billionaire Patrice Motsepe – a side that won the African Champions League in 2016. Two years ago, in the quarter-final of the same competition, Mosimane's team played Al Ahly off the park in the first leg and the 5-0 win was the heaviest defeat in some 80 years for the Egyptian giants.

Sundowns have proven a nemesis for the North African sides who usually dominate the Champions League and the attacking, flowing style of their play has earned him many admirers.

He arrived at Al Ahly in September, just weeks after they had won another league title. Within two months, he had added the CAF Champions League and Egypt Cup to complete the club's third treble. Now, he carries a heavy burden, flying the flag for other promising black coaches seeking to break through the barrier of injustice.

Mark Gleeson

eye witness

Phil Gordon reports

SCOTLAND

No more years of hurt

Phil Gordon looks back on Scotland's long wait to qualify for a major tournament

This Scotland supporter could not bear the tension; on his feet imploring the referee to end the agony. And then, unquenchable joy.

If November 12, 2020 in Belgrade is the start of Scotland's new story, the start of the old one was September 26, 1973. The best of times are the back-story to the worst.

I was fortunate to be at Hampden Park on the night when Scotland beat Czechoslovakia 2-1 to reach the 1974 World Cup finals. I was 13 but it still remains the high-water mark of Scotland occasions, even after all these years.

The noise has never been equalled. The roars of 100,000 fans pierced the Glasgow night sky, three times: first when Jim Holton headed a first-half equaliser, then again for Joe Jordan's 75th-minute winner, and lastly, at full-time.

My father was a teacher who was not big on public displays of emotion, yet he grabbed my Scotland flag and was punching it high into the air. His generation had to wait 16 years for Scotland to reach any finals. The gap between the 1958 World Cup was long.

16 years seems now like early parole. Scotland footballers, and fans, have been stuck in Shawshank for 22 years, feeling forgotten when big tournaments dominate every summer since our last in France at the 1998 World Cup.

But, then, one incredible moment from goalkeeper David Marshall, diving to his left to save Aleksandar Mitrovic's penalty to decide the play-off final against Serbia, and it's Scotland who have seized the passport for Euro 2020.

The eerie silence of the Stadion Rajko Mitic was shattered by the shrieks of disbelief from Steve Clarke's players as they descended on Marshall. The empty stadium symbolised these COVID times. There were no Serbia supporters, just as Hampden was empty for the semi-final penalty shoot-out win over Israel.

Scotland's fans could not have an away day in Belgrade. Visiting media were also kept away. So, the Tartan Army and every journalist had to make do with watching television in their living rooms (Scotland's bars have also been closed by COVID). You could not have found a greater contrast to Hampden and beating the Czechs in 1973.

Nothing could stem the joy. Every celebration might have been self-isolated but nothing could dilute the feelings of relief as 22 years of frustration washed away. Scotland netted all five kicks with German precision and hero Marshall produced a decisive hand to save the final penalty, on the same goal line that Antonin Panenka beat Sepp Maier to win the 1976 European Championship for Czechoslovakia against West Germany; the first-ever finals to be decided on penalties.

Panenka was actually on the side that lost at Hampden three years earlier. His famous dink is now trademarked; perhaps David Marshall should look into the possibility of trademarking his save? Or even his celebration: begging for the referee's approval first before jumping into the arms of his jubilant team-mates.

In order to understand the emotion of the Scottish public at ending this football famine, you have to place it against the feast that fans enjoyed for three decades. Scotland qualified for five consecutive World Cup finals between 1974 and 1990. Missing out on 1994 was soothed by reaching the finals of Euro '92 and Euro '96. Players and supporters expected to be there.

Indeed, when France '98 was held, it was almost as if FIFA had called in central casting for the opening game. Champions Brazil, the best team in the world, against Scotland with the best fans. There were 20,000 Scots in the Stade de France – plus me and my compatriots in the press box – watching Craig Brown's players strolling across the turf in their kilts before the match.

When John Collins equalised with a penalty, we dared to dream. Only for Brazil to win with a fortuitous late own goal from Tom Boyd. A 1-1 draw with Norway in Bordeaux and a 3-0 defeat to Morocco in Saint-Etienne saw Scotland eliminated. The team camp near Avignon in the south of France was idyllic under the warm sun, but Scotland's participation at finals went into deep cold storage.

Ten tournaments came and went without Scotland on the guest list: five World Cups and five European Championships. Six managers tried to break a cycle that became increasingly impossible after Brown stood down in 2002, starting with Berti Vogts – the

Rematch...Gary McAllister holds his head after his penalty is saved against England at Euro '96

Jubilation...Scotland's players rush forward to celebrate with Marshall after his decisive save

coach who won Euro '96 for Germany – Walter Smith, Alex McLeish, George Burley, Craig Levein and Gordon Strachan, before McLeish returned in 2018.

Scotland won their Nations League group with McLeish but his tenure ended after just 14 months following a shocking 3-0 Euro 2020 qualifying-group defeat in Kazakhstan. Clarke arrived in May 2019, with no chance of qualifying as unbeaten Belgium and Russia took the top two places. The new manager finished third with the knowledge that the play-off "joker" from the Nations League was there as a fall back.

Such a modest route might have been unthinkable back in the days of Kenny Dalglish or Jordan, but Clarke's side leapt on the chance. Two decades of exile meant good players such as Darren Fletcher, James McFadden, Barry Ferguson, Scott Brown and Shaun Maloney had all missed out any finals.

The first two misses were so close, losing to England in the Euro 2000 play-off despite winning the second leg at Wembley, and also to Netherlands in the Euro 2004 play-off, with McFadden's winner at Hampden wiped out by a 6-0 defeat in Amsterdam.

McFadden would also score a stunning winner in Paris during Scotland's Euro 2008 qualifying group, as they were drawn alongside both of the previous World Cup finalists, France and Italy. The Scots even topped the table going into their final two matches, but a 2-0 defeat in Georgia and 91st-minute sucker-punch from Italian defender Christian Panucci ended their hopes.

Watching the play-off action unfold in a television studio in Glasgow doing match analysis, McFadden and Fletcher were genuinely pleased that Scotland's class of 2020 had achieved what they could not. "I never got there, but I don't have one bit of bad feeling to these players," said McFadden. "I am proud of them. You talk about 22 years. It's been such a long time since fans even saw Scotland at a major finals."

Fletcher had special praise for Marshall, who made his Scotland debut in 2004 as a Celtic teenager, and is now 35 with Derby County. "We had three very good keepers in Craig Gordon, Allan McGregor and David Marshall and David is the most underrated of the lot," said the former Manchester United player. "David kept turning up, never letting his country down, and now, thanks to Belgrade, he's the hero of Scotland."

Even better for Scotland, Glasgow is one of the venues for Euro 2020 and the prize for winning in Belgrade are two games at Hampden against the Czech Republic and Croatia. In a repeat of Euro '96, their other group game will take place at Wembley against England.

New generation... Andy Robertson and John McGinn lead the celebrations

Ironically, London is actually Clarke's adopted home, after ten years as a Chelsea defender. Even though his playing career included a Cup-winners Cup triumph in 1998, Clarke's six Scotland caps never included a finals appearance. He was left out of the squads for the 1990 and 1998 World Cups, and Euro '92 and Euro '96.

"When I came into the Scotland job I spoke about my disappointment of missing out on Italia '90 as a player," said Clarke a week after Belgrade. "Does this make up for it, or erase it? I don't know. It's a different kind of feeling as a manager."

One of Clarke's contemporaries, who did feature for Scotland at Euro '92 and '96, and France '98, is Kevin Gallacher. The striker scored nine times in 53 caps, growing visibly in international stature after his first taste in Euro '92 against Netherlands, Germany and CIS (Russia). Gallacher feels Clarke's finals rookies can thrive at Euro 2020.

"I always believed we had enough talent in Scotland," said Kevin, now 53. "We have had great talent but those players never graced a finals and that's a sad thing. But now we hope this next generation uses this great achievement. When you experience it, like we did, it's massive. It's great for your country and you as a footballer."

> "What if the nation now believes in the potential of the future, rather than burdened by the weight of the past?"
>
> **Hugh MacDonald, *Sunday National***

In the absence of international football status, the Scottish public transferred its affection to Andy Murray. The tennis star – a massive Scotland fan – was one of the first people to congratulate Clarke's team and there is little doubt Murray's self-belief is reflected in Andy Robertson and co.

It took veteran football writer, Hugh MacDonald, hardened by knocks at 65, to sum it up best. "What if the nation now believes in the potential of the future, rather than burdened by the weight of the past?" MacDonald wrote in the *Sunday National*. The quote was so good it appeared on the poster the newspaper published of the Scotland team hugging in Belgrade.

Now, the goal for Clarke's players is to become poster boys for a new generation of Scotland fans.

Hero...manager Steve Clarke

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EURO 2020

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Your guide to the 24 qualifiers for the Euros

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TURKEY

Gunes returns to repeat heroics of 2002

OVERVIEW

Through to only their second major international tournament in 12 years, the Turks have every chance of improving on their poor showing at Euro 2016 when they made a first-round exit.

- In qualification, they were good enough to take four points out of six from world champions France and just a few months ago, held Germany to a 3-3 draw in a friendly in Cologne, a morale-boosting encounter in which the guests came from behind no fewer than three times.
- Veteran coach Senol Gunes, now in his second spell in charge, has pieced together a rather atypical Turkish side, reliant on teamwork, organisation and consistency rather than flashes of individual brilliance.
- His squad is also awash with youthful talent and enthusiasm, and to make a refreshing change, there are no competing cliques.

Upset...Turkey beat world champions France for the first time in their history during qualifying

TACTICS

Whether going with a 4-3-3, 4-1-4-1 or 4-2-3-1 formation, Gunes' priorities are written in stone: defensive solidity, a compact shape and the avoidance of unnecessary mistakes. Little wonder they conceded just three goals in their Euro 2020 qualifying group.

STAR MAN

Hakan CALHANOGLU

Cultured German-born attacking midfielder currently shining in Italy for Milan. Made his name at Bayer Leverkusen.

COACH

Senol GUNES

The mastermind of Turkey's greatest football achievement: a bronze medal at the 2002 World Cup.

PLAYER PROFILE

Target man...Yilmaz holds off Hungary's Willi Orban

BURAK YILMAZ

Turkey's skipper and front-line focal point may not be in the full flush of youth – he is 35 to be precise – but has not lost an ounce of his trademark desire, combativeness and leadership qualities. Vocal, uncompromising and imbued with a steely will-to-win, he is the one who drives the others on, someone who sounds the bugle of battle and is never ready to embrace the idea of defeat. He is Turkey's second-most prolific marksman of all time, with 24 goals in 63 appearances. Over the years, he has proved himself a finishing machine in the Turkish League, rattling in 188 goals and starring for Besiktas, Galatasaray and Trabzonspor.

He came close to joining Arsenal back in 2013, and spent two years in China between 2016 and 2017. In the summer, he left Turkey for the second time in his career to join French side Lille, where he has settled in amazingly quickly, scoring four goals in his first eight games.

Trash-talker extraordinaire and an expert at drawing fouls from opponents, he will be vital this summer.

Nick Bidwell

ITALY

Mancini re-building Italy's reputation after World Cup failure

OVERVIEW

Italy go to the Euros at the front of the starting grid, and with good reason. As well as a favourable draw that will see them play all their group games in Rome, they haven't lost a game since September 2018.

Coach Roberto Mancini, called in to pick up the pieces after Italy's historic failure to qualify for Russia 2018, has done a remarkable job to create an exciting young team which not only plays well but keeps on winning.

On the night that his Italy dazzled in a 2-0 Nations League win over Poland, that victory marked 21 consecutive games without defeat. More impressive than that was the 30-pass, "tiki-taka" style move that culminated in their second goal.

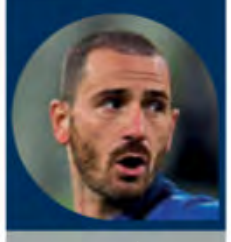
Put simply, Mancini has created a bright, audacious and thoroughly modern *Azzurri* side such as rarely seen before. Prepare for some big surprises this summer.

Unbeaten...Victory over Poland in Reggio Emilia marked 21 games without defeat for the *Azzurri*

TACTICS

To say that Italy have switched to an attacking 4-3-3 formation does not do justice to the radical change of mindset under the current management. Unlike previous Italy sides, Mancini's men defend high up and constantly take the game to their opponents.

STAR MAN



Leonardo BONUCCI

If you were looking for a personal bodyguard on a visit to Syria, Bonucci would be the man.

COACH

Roberto MANCINI

Outrageously talented attacker as a player, 56 year-old Mancini is proving to be even better as a coach.

PLAYER PROFILE

Flair...Napoli winger Insigne

LORENZO INSIGNE

For the 29-year-old Napoli captain, Euro 2020 may represent a final chance to establish himself on the international stage.

Ever since he scored 18 goals alongside Ciro Immobile and Marco Verratti in the Pescara side that won Serie B in 2011-12, Insigne has been one of the great, unrealised hopes of Italian football. That, however, may have much to do with the fact that for the last nine seasons he has played for Napoli.

His outrageous talent, ability to both score and set up goals, pace and low centre of gravity, have all inevitably prompted a crippling comparison with the late Diego Maradona. The weight of expectation regarding their Naples-born captain has not always helped him, indeed has prompted bitter rifts with Napoli fans, especially during last season's dispute between the players and owner Aurelio De Laurentis.

Insigne, however, is always a potential match-winner. In the context of this attack-minded Italy, in which he is seen as a "main man", he could reach new heights.

Paddy Agnew

WALES

Bale and co. chasing highs of 2016 once again

OVERVIEW

Semi-finalists at Euro 2016, this is a new-look Wales team hoping to at least emulate that success.

While some of the star names of that tournament remain, Ryan Giggs' faith in youth has been rewarded with the emergence of a new generation establishing themselves in his plans.

Qualification was not going to plan for the Dragons until the midway point. The introduction of Cardiff City target man Kieffer Moore provided a different dynamic and proved to be the missing piece of the puzzle. The striker has repaid Giggs' decision with an impressive goal return.

There is a confidence and maturity within the squad that has vindicated Giggs' approach to creating a team in his own vision. The manager has plenty of options in the attacking third and his tactical system provides an overload in that area, but its success relies on a disciplined and solid defence.

History...the Dragons had never qualified for back-to-back European Championships before

TACTICS

Mirroring his own playing traits, Giggs' side play with width and pace in attack in his preferred 4-2-3-1 formation. The defensive protection of a double pivot in central midfield allows the full-backs to support the forward line in this high-energy system.

STAR MAN

Gareth BALE

Rejuvenated at Spurs, Bale is getting back to his best for both club and country.

COACH

Ryan GIGGS

High standards were ingrained at Manchester United and he demands the same as a manager.

PLAYER PROFILE

Playmaker...Ramsey is crucial to Wales' hopes

AARON RAMSEY

Suspended for the Euro 2016 semi-final against eventual winners Portugal, Aaron Ramsey has unfinished business having experienced the highs and lows of international football. Now pulling the strings in his preferred role at the tip of the Juventus midfield, he has embraced the freedom and faith shown in his ability by coach Andrea Pirlo. *L'architetto* was always likely to have a high-level appreciation for Ramsey's intelligent play and vision with the ball.

Although Gareth Bale remains the talisman of this Wales team, it is the presence of Ramsey that brings the best out of him. Injuries have severely limited the ex-Arsenal midfielder's international involvement, but he produced on his one and only start in Euro 2020 qualifying by scoring both goals in the decisive 2-0 win over Hungary. Ramsey turned 30 in December, but his style of play will benefit from his experience at this level, and if he can avoid the niggling injuries that have proved so frustrating he can again influence and impress as he did in 2016.

Mark Pitman

SWITZERLAND

Swiss aiming to take the next step at a major tournament

OVERVIEW

Switzerland have been transformed over the last decade, becoming a side that regularly qualifies for World Cups and European Championships.

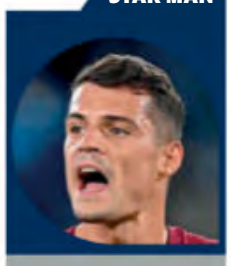
- Much of this is due to the influence of second-generation immigrants, mainly from the former Yugoslavia, who have given the side a swagger and spikiness that may have been missing in the past.
- After reaching the last 16 at each of their last three tournaments, Switzerland will be looking to break through that barrier and reach the quarter-finals this summer. They will also want to wipe out the poor impression left by their lacklustre elimination at the hands of Sweden in the last World Cup.
- They only lost once in Euro qualifying and, although they failed to win any of their first seven games following the coronavirus stoppage, those games have included two draws against Germany and one against Spain.

Table-toppers...celebrating a goal against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin in September 2019

TACTICS

Coach Vladimir Petkovic's philosophy is that his team should dominate and take the initiative no matter who they are playing against. Tactics are often flexible, but a general feature is a three-man defence in either a 3-5-2 or 3-4-3 formation.

STAR MAN



Granit XHAKA

The captain makes the Switzerland midfield tick with his refined passing and competitive edge.

COACH

Vladimir PETKOVIC

The Bosnian spent most of his playing career in Switzerland. Coached Lazio before taking the Swiss job in 2014.

PLAYER PROFILE

Sharp-shooter...Shaqiri is Switzerland's match winner

XHERDAN SHAQIRI

Once nicknamed the "Alpine Messi," it is fair to say that Shaqiri has not yet lived up to that moniker.

Having made the breakthrough with Basle, he moved to Bayern Munich at the age of 19 but it proved premature and he struggled for regular football. A short stint at Internazionale was no more successful, but he made a better impression at Stoke City in England's Premier League.

That form earned his move to Liverpool, yet in spite of some bright moments – notably scoring a brace against Manchester United – he has generally found himself on the fringes of the first team once again.

Even so, there is no doubting his talent. He has extraordinary ability when shooting from distance – which he has shown in exasperating glimpses, such as his stunning hat-trick against Honduras at the 2014 World Cup and his spectacular scissors-kick goal against Poland at Euro 2016.

Last year, he asked to be left out of the squad to concentrate on his club career but returned in October for the Nations League matches.

Brian Homewood

DENMARK

29 years on from their greatest moment, Danes eye another upset

OVERVIEW

Fairy-tale winners in 1992, Denmark have a happy history at the Euros and could be dark horses yet again, with a settled team of players brought together from some of the best clubs in Europe; from Barcelona to Internazionale to Borussia Dortmund.

- They have lost only twice in their past 23 matches, both to world No.1 ranked Belgium. The Danes are a well-organised and tight-knit group with the benefit of a high-class creative talisman in Christian Eriksen, whose form never dips on the international stage.
- Kasper Schmeichel is a goalkeeping rock for the side, and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg has flourished as a holding midfielder following his transfer to Tottenham Hotspur.
- The greatest problem for Denmark will be finding goals; they remain too reliant on Eriksen in that department. But, remember, most goals came from midfield in that 1992 side.

Upset...Denmark sealed a shock victory against England at Wembley last October

TACTICS

New head coach Kasper Hjulmand has switched between 4-3-3 and 3-4-2-1 formations, preferring the solidity of the former against stronger opponents. The key, always, is for the system to allow space for Eriksen to threaten with his deft passing and darting runs.

STAR MAN

Christian ERIKSEN

With more than 100 caps at the age of 28, the majestic Danish playmaker is the heartbeat of the team.

COACH

Kasper HJULMAND

Innovative and flexible, he won the Danish title with Nordsjaelland before a short, difficult spell in Germany at Mainz.

PLAYER PROFILE

Defender...Kjaer challenges Iceland's Jon Dadi Bodvarsson

SIMON KJAER

Like a fine wine, Kjaer has improved with age through a peripatetic career that has taken in spells at Palermo, Wolfsburg, Roma, Lille, Fenerbahce, Sevilla, Atalanta and, finally, Milan. It is little wonder, perhaps, that he is fluent in five languages.

The 31-year-old central defender is now flourishing at the San Siro, swiftly becoming a key component of a Milan team challenging properly in Serie A for the first time in years.

Kjaer's great strength is his composure, both in reading the play and in passing through the lines accurately from the back. When a battle is required, he has the strength, courage and street-wise experience for that too.

During the Nations League he drew level on 102 international caps with Denmark's greatest all-time defender Morten Olsen, against whom all Danes are judged. Kjaer does not suffer too badly by comparison.

The European Championship will be his fifth major tournament stretching back to the 2010 World Cup, and his second as team captain.

Jim Holden

FINLAND

Pukki leads Finns to their first-ever tournament

OVERVIEW

After a wait of 82 years and over 30 fruitless qualification campaigns, the Finns finally have a seat at the game's top table, about to sink their teeth into their first-ever football main course.

● Even when featuring world-class players like Liverpool centre-back Sami Hyypia and Ajax No.10 Jari Litmanen, past Finnish sides always fell short. So full marks to the present-day heroes, not least thoughtful coach Markku Kanerva and talismanic Norwich City striker Teemu Pukki.

● Once thought of as Scandinavian soccer slackers – unworthy cousins to Denmark, Sweden and Norway – Pukki and co. suddenly have made football as popular as the nation's other favourite sports: ice hockey, skiing, middle-distance running and the javelin.

● The country is excited: "We are ready for the European Championships," said a Finnish broadcaster on qualification. "The century of misery is over."

History...Finland celebrate reaching the European Championship for the first time in their history

TACTICS

While their default template is a no-frills 4-4-2, Kanerva often switches to a 5-4-1 when up against superior opposition. Their basic philosophy prioritises defensive resolve, with creativity from wide areas and Pukki's opportunism providing the goals.

STAR MAN

Teemu PUKKI

In the prime of his life as chance-converter, he netted ten of Finland's 16 goals in qualification.

COACH

Markku KANERVA

A former teacher and HJK Helsinki centre-back, who played for the club in the 1998-99 Champions League.

PLAYER PROFILE

Safe hands...goalkeeper Hradecky

LUKAS HRADECKY

The 31-year-old Bayer Leverkusen goalkeeper, a mainstay between the Finnish posts for a decade, is two characters in one: a rumbustious, happy-go-lucky joker off the pitch, but deadly serious in his approach to his profession. Widely-considered one of the top five custodians in the Bundesliga, the towering Hradecky is an outstanding modern goalkeeper, combining the sharpest of reflexes, a commanding presence, comfort on the ball and a happy knack of coming out on top in one-on-one confrontations. With his long arms and legs, he forms quite a barrier.

Born in Slovakia, he was just a toddler when his family emigrated to the southern Finnish town of Turku. He clearly has inherited the ball-handling ability of his father Vlado, who played volleyball for a living. Back in 2009 while playing for Danish side Esbjerg, Hradecky had the chance to join Manchester United, only to turn down the offer: "I didn't want to be the fifth or sixth-choice keeper there and be loaned out to a fourth division club," he said.

Nick Bidwell

BELGIUM

Pressure is on the world's No.1 ranked team

OVERVIEW

Belgium have maintained their attractive style from the World Cup. The team boasted a perfect record in Euro qualifying with ten wins out of ten and a goal difference of +37.

Roberto Martinez has had to shuffle the defence after Vincent Kompany retired to become coach at Anderlecht, recently calling up youngsters Zinho Vanheusden and Sebastiaan Bornauw. Further forward, winger Jeremy Doku of Rennes is a player to watch. In total, 19 players have debuted under Martinez.

Belgium have a relatively easy group alongside Denmark, Russia and Finland, although they will be the away side in both Copenhagen and Saint Petersburg.

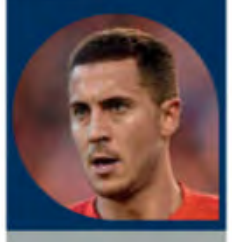
Coach Martinez keeps downplaying Belgium's Euro title credentials, but with both Kevin De Bruyne and Eden Hazard nearing their 30th birthdays and an ageing defence, there is a sense of urgency that Belgium need to deliver this summer.

Stretch...Dries Mertens controls the ball during Belgium's 5-1 Nations League win over Iceland

TACTICS

Thibaut Courtois, Axel Witsel, Kevin De Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku form the spine in Belgium's compact 3-4-3. The Belgians have mastered the system to perfection with like-for-like replacements in most positions. Martinez, however, still does not have a plan B.

STAR MAN



Eden HAZARD

Struggling at Real Madrid with injuries and form, he last featured v Cyprus in November 2019.

COACH

Roberto MARTINEZ

After spells in the Premier League with Wigan and Everton, the Spaniard succeeded Marc Wilmots in 2016.

PLAYER PROFILE

Leader...De Bruyne has worn the captain's armband in Hazard's absence

KEVIN DE BRUYNE

The flame-haired midfielder is the undisputed leader of the Belgian national team. With the retirement of Vincent Kompany and the persistent injuries of Eden Hazard, De Bruyne has been liberated and occupies a central role in the team's 3-4-3 formation, one that allows him to dictate the play and set the pace. A genuine playmaker, whom few players can match, De Bruyne has a complete arsenal of skills – genuine two-footedness, strength, vision, accurate long shooting, the ability to execute defence-splitting passes and tactical excellence.

Playing deep in midfield, his presence in the final third is perhaps more pronounced in a Belgium jersey than at his club Manchester City, but he has still provided more than 30 assists for the national team. The 29-year-old, however, has complained about this year's congested calendar and was visibly out of shape against England in the Nations League. That is a major worry because De Bruyne, both down-to-earth and ambitious, will not be satisfied with another semi-final finish at a major tournament.

Samindra Kunti

RUSSIA

Ageing squad still living off success of 2018

OVERVIEW

With Lev Yashin as the goalkeeper, the USSR became the first country to win the European Championship in 1960, before reaching the final again in 1988, losing to the Dutch.

- Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the best result achieved by Russia was reaching the semi-finals under Guus Hiddink in 2008.
- Hopes arisen after the 2018 World Cup were shattered by the team's two qualifying losses to Belgium. Despite making it to the Euro finals Stanislav Cherchesov was criticised for relying too much on the old guard instead of blooding new talent in the squad.
- Figures like Artem Dzyuba, 32, and Yuri Zhirkov, 37, are still irreplaceable, with the next generation still waiting to emerge. Options are particularly short in defence where the team does not look solid, while up front much depends on target man Dzuyba, voted the country's best footballer again last season.

TACTICS

Two midfielders protect the back four, and going forward each of the attacking midfielders interchange with Dzyuba, a good passer who likes to drop deep and influence the play. In emergencies, a second striker will come off the bench alongside him.

Main man...veteran Zenit striker Artem Dzyuba will lead the line for Russia this summer

STAR MAN

Aleksei MIRANCHUK

Used to play with his twin brother Anton at Lokomotiv Moscow before moving to Atalanta in August.

COACH

Stanislav CHERCHESOV

Former international goalkeeper became the national team manager in 2016 after winning the double with Legia Warsaw.

PLAYER PROFILE

Adopted hero...Mario Fernandes

MARIO FERNANDES

The Brazilian-born right-back joined CSKA Moscow from Gremio for €15m in 2012 and instantly became one of the club's leading figures, winning the national championship three times in his first four seasons.

Having missed his flight when first summoned to the Brazil national team in 2011, he made his debut against Japan three years later. As it was only a friendly, he was eligible to play for Russia when he gained his nationality in 2016, and since then has won over 20 caps and become a fans' favourite.

Reliable at the back and even more effective when going forward, Mario revived Russia's World Cup chances with an extra-time goal against Croatia in 2018, but missed from the spot in the penalty shoot-out.

Valued at about €30m, Fernandes tops the transfer price list among the Russian Premier League defenders, but he is even more valuable to the national team, as proven by his Nations League record: with him in the team, Russia won two out of two; without him they drew two and lost two, including a 5-0 defeat to Serbia.

Victor Gusev

NETHERLANDS

Back at a major tournament after a seven-year absence

OVERVIEW

With six victories, one defeat and one draw, the Netherlands finished second behind Germany in what was a smooth qualifying campaign. It's their first major tournament since the 2014 World Cup, where they finished third.

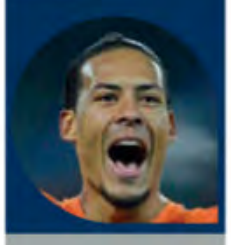
- Netherlands won their only major silverware at Euro '88. Since then they have finished World Cup runners-up in 2010, but never reached another Euros final. 2016 was only the second time they have failed to qualify since 1976.
- Ajax and PSV are no longer the main purveyor of *Oranje* talent, but AZ Alkmaar. The inclusion of Teun Koopmeiners, Owen Wijndal, Calvin Stengs, Myron Boadu and Marco Bizot shows where the real talent is at the moment.
- Coach Ronald Koeman decided to move to Barcelona when Euro 2020 was postponed. The Dutch FA opted for former international Frank de Boer, a disputed choice given that he has been sacked by his three previous employers.

Finally...Netherlands ended their wait for a major tournament with a 0-0 draw in Belfast

TACTICS

De Boer can play a traditional 4-3-3 or a 5-3-2 system, where Memphis Depay is given a free role up front. Frenkie de Jong gives De Boer additional options, with the Barcelona man capable of playing at centre-back, as a controlling midfielder or in a more attacking role.

STAR MAN



Virgil VAN DIJK

One of the world's best defenders and a charismatic leader, De Boer is praying for a full recovery.

COACH

Frank DE BOER

Former Dutch international has less than a year to install his own ideas and attempt to restore his reputation.

PLAYER PROFILE

Goal-grabber...no current player has scored more goals for the Netherlands than Wijnaldum

GEORGINIO WIJNALDUM

When it comes to *Oranje* the story often goes about the rock-steady defensive duo of Virgil van Dijk and Matthijs de Ligt, Frenkie de Jong's ability to find solutions, or the unpredictability of Memphis Depay. But one man is often overlooked, although he is just as crucial as the players above.

Liverpool's Gini Wijnaldum plays an important role by keeping the team together on the pitch and by emerging up front at the right time.

For years, the Rotterdam-born midfielder was described as a "mailman" during his spells at Feyenoord and PSV in the Eredivisie, accused of running with the ball at his feet for too long, bringing the ball to a team-mate rather than passing it.

It was his Premier League switch from Newcastle United to Liverpool in 2016 that made the difference. In Jurgen Klopp's system, the indefatigable Wijnaldum can do what he does best on the pitch: being everywhere he is needed. With eight goals during the qualifiers – Netherlands' top scorer – Frank de Boer knows that he cannot do without his midfield motor.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

UKRAINE

Shevchenko bidding to increase his legendary status

OVERVIEW

Ukraine earned a place at Euro 2020 after the best qualifying campaign in their history. *Zbirna* started with a goalless draw in Lisbon, then won six of their next seven, hammering Serbia 5-0 and beating Portugal 2-1 at home to secure top spot.

After a disastrous Euro 2016 featuring three defeats, Andriy Shevchenko was appointed to his first coaching role. The country's all-time top scorer received a vote of confidence after failing to reach the 2018 World Cup, and has extended his contract until 2022.

Under Shevchenko, Ukraine have found a balance between defensive solidity and attacking creativity. Andriy Yarmolenko is the senior attacker, while talents like Ruslan Malinovskyi, Roman Yaremchuk and Oleksandr Zinchenko have matured into key performers.

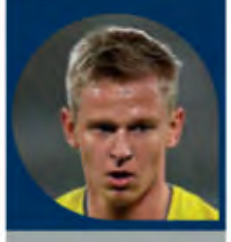
Shevchenko, like his mentor Valery Lobanovsky, has managed to instil in his players a winning mentality.

History...Ukraine beat Spain for the first time ever in last October's Nations League clash

TACTICS

In Shevchenko's 4-3-3, the creative figures are midfielders Zinchenko and Malinovskyi, while Taras Stepanenko is responsible for the balance between defence and attack. Naturalised Marlos adds a Brazilian touch, while attacking ace Yaremchuk provides the industry.

STAR MAN



Oleksandr ZINCHENKO

In a more attacking role for Ukraine than Manchester City, he takes up positions to receive passes and create chances.

COACH

Andriy SHEVCHENKO

Prolific scorer during his playing career, he has had a big impact on Ukraine as a coach.

PLAYER PROFILE

Atalanta star...Malinovskyi

RUSLAN MALINOVSKYI

Shakhtar Donetsk academy graduate Ruslan Malinovskyi, now playing for Serie A side Atalanta, became the leading player of the Ukrainian national team during the successful Euro 2020 qualifying campaign, playing all eight matches, scoring three goals and creating another three.

Yet his influence in Shevchenko's side goes far beyond numbers. The 27-year-old midfielder is the engine that tirelessly drives the team forward. He dictates the tempo for the team, and is crucial for retaining possession. With his ability to make skilful, quick passes, Malinovskyi opens the gate for the forwards Andriy Yarmolenko and Roman Yaremchuk to run through. One of his main virtues is his lack of fear when turning with the ball and driving forward looking for a pass. He is a major threat from dead-ball situations too, possessing a powerful and dipping free-kick strike.

Signed from Belgian side Genk after scoring 13 league goals in 2018-19, his role in Bergamo has mostly been as a super-sub: of his first 53 games for Atalanta, 36 came off the bench.

Oleg Zadernovsky

AUSTRIA

Alaba and co. hoping for better than 2016 disappointment

OVERVIEW

Having never played at the Euros before co-hosting the tournament in 2008 with Switzerland, Austria will be taking part for the third time in 2021, hoping to go beyond the group stage for the first time in their history.

- At Euro 2016, they arrived with confidence after storming through the qualifiers, but bowed out with only one point – a drab 0-0 draw with Portugal – having lost to Hungary and Iceland.
- This time, expectations are lower, but almost all of their key players are based in the German Bundesliga and exposed to top-level competition week-in, week-out.
- The one exception is China-based forward Marko Arnautovic. The 31-year-old played a key part in qualifying, was excluded from the September and October matches then recalled again in November. It remains to be seen if the former Stoke City and West Ham United star can retain his competitive edge.

Front man...Michael Gregoritsch celebrates scoring against Northern Ireland in Belfast

TACTICS

Austria play a 4-2-3-1 formation. The main change that coach Franco Foda has made has been to field key man David Alaba at left-back rather than in midfield, the Bayern Munich star's position under previous national team coach Marcel Koller.

STAR MAN

David ALABA

Six-time Austrian Footballer of the Year and twice the country's Sportsman of the Year.

COACH

Franco FODA

Appointed in 2017, the German has had three spells coaching Sturm Graz and one season with Kaiserslautern.

PLAYER PROFILE

Midfield maestro...Sabitzer

MARCEL SABITZER

Marcel, whose father Herfried won six caps for Austria in the 1990s, has played a key role in the rise of Bundesliga side RB Leipzig.

He joined the club in 2014 and was immediately loaned out to sister club RB Salzburg, but was brought back for 2015-16 when they were still in the second tier. He was ever-present as they won promotion that season and has been a firm fixture in the Bundesliga ever since.

Sabitzer was raised at Admira Wacker and turned down the chance of an early move to German side Borussia Monchengladbach so that he could get regular first-team football.

At Leipzig, he has always been somewhat out of the spotlight, which has shone instead on the likes of Naby Keita, Emil Forsberg and Timo Werner.

But that suits him. He has all the qualities of a player who plays under the Red Bull system – integral at sparking counter-attacks, tactically aware and extremely versatile. He has been a regular for Austria since 2015 (making his debut in 2012) but injuries have restricted him to just 44 caps.

Brian Homewood

NORTH MACEDONIA

Pandev bidding to make more history at his country's first tournament

OVERVIEW

North Macedonia reached their first-ever major tournament via the play-offs, with national hero Goran Pandev netting the winner against Georgia. Despite public gatherings being banned, people crowded the streets waving flags, while fireworks coloured the night sky in celebration.

Five years ago, when coach Igor Angelovski took command, it looked like an impossible dream, with his first tasking persuading Pandev to return to the squad after a two-year absence.

Alongside Pandev's experience, youth has been added. Seven of the youngsters that qualified for the Under-21 European Championship for the first time in the country's history in 2017 have been promoted to the senior team.

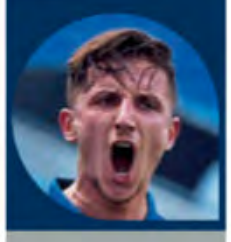
As a result, the Red Lions have climbed almost 100 places on the FIFA rankings. Other than Croatia, North Macedonia are the only other former Yugoslavian nation at Euro 2020.

History...North Macedonia held on to win their play-off final against Georgia in Tbilisi 1-0

TACTICS

While a passing game favours the creative talents of Pandev and Bardhi, with further dribbling ability coming out wide in the shape of full-backs Ezgjan Alioski and Stefan Ristovski, and winger Eljif Elmas, a more cautious game will be required at the Euros.

STAR MAN



Enis BARDHI

Highest-scoring foreign player in Levante's history and one of the best free-kick takers in La Liga.

COACH

Igor ANGELOVSKI

In a notoriously divided region, Angelovski has created a team that is united by its will to win.

PLAYER PROFILE

Leader...Pandev holds onto the ball in Georgia

GORAN PANDEV

With his gentle touch past the Georgian goalkeeper – his 36th goal in his 114th game – Pandev fulfilled a promise to his children: to come back home from Georgia with a win.

The highest goalscorer in North Macedonia's history is a Genoa veteran, one of the longest-serving players in Italy. He was a part of Jose Mourinho's treble-winning Internazionale side in 2010, but nothing compares with the feeling of hearing your anthem at a European Championship.

There were some bad times for Pandev in his relationship with the North Macedonian FA, but he has been proven right in deciding to lead the team again, with the UEFA Nations League offering a chance of qualification. His winning spirit was contagious for the rest of the team.

At one point, a coronavirus outbreak within Genoa threatened his chances of travelling to Georgia for the play-off, but fate had other ideas.

Now aged 37, he will struggle to play 90 minutes at the finals, but 20 years after his international debut, he will give everything to make more history for his country.

Milorad Stojmanovski

ENGLAND

Southgate aiming to recapture magic of 2018

OVERVIEW

With Wembley set to host all of England's group matches, the semis and the final, chants of "Football's Coming Home" are sure to be revived this summer. Yet the enthusiasm of 2018-19 has dampened.

- The exciting, free-scoring side that reached the inaugural Nations League finals and breezed through Euro 2020 qualifying has been replaced by a more solid and defensive outfit, with far fewer goals at both ends of the pitch in 2020.
- Southgate has returned to a back three, but with a 3-4-3 instead of a 3-5-2. Realistically, March's 2022 World Cup qualifiers will be his final chance to experiment with formations.
- He is blessed with arguably more attacking options than any England boss since Euro '96, plus an abundance of quality right-backs. Yet the lack of a world-class centre-back continues to hold the team back, while keeper Jordan Pickford's struggles remain a concern.

TACTICS

While the 3-4-3 that Southgate favours can lack creativity, that can be amended by changes of personnel. Bukayo Saka offers more in attack than Ben Chilwell, Mason Mount may play in midfield versus lesser opponents, while Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho wait in the wings.

Coming home...England are aiming to be at Wembley again for the Euros final on July 11

STAR MAN

Harry KANE

The World Cup Golden Boot winner is just as likely to create a goal as score one.

COACH

Gareth SOUTHGATE

Has lost the untouchable status he had in 2018, but he has total faith in his plans and his players.

PLAYER PROFILE

Fans' favourite...Grealish skips past Kevin De Bruyne

JACK GREALISH

After England's World Cup semi-final defeat to Croatia in 2018, one player stood out as the difference between the two sides: Luka Modric.

While Jordan Henderson, Dele Alli and Jesse Lingard huffed and puffed, the Real Madrid midfielder floated and probed, always willing to take the ball and play the right pass. Calls for England to find a playmaker of their own became a priority, and two years later the prime candidate has emerged.

Grealish's autumn displays triggered something of a national debate. Simply outstanding on his debut against Wales, he was left on the bench versus Belgium three days later, much to fans' frustration. He did play in the return clash however – following another man of the match display against the Republic of Ireland – and was unquestionably England's best performer in the 2-0 defeat.

Southgate is unlikely to appease fans by accommodating Grealish in a new system alongside Raheem Sterling, Kane and Rashford. Yet the Aston Villa skipper offers a skillset that is not only different from that trio, but also extremely well suited to international football.

Jamie Evans

CROATIA

World Cup finalists head to the Euros with new-look squad

OVERVIEW

Croatia supporters believe their team's place is among the contenders for the trophy, in spite of the changes since reaching the World Cup final.

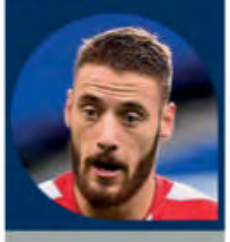
- Only three of their starting 11 in Moscow featured in their most recent fixtures: Danijel Subasic and Mario Mandzukic ended their international careers in 2018 and Ivan Rakitic followed them in September, while Sime Vrsaljko, Marcelo Brozovic and Ante Rebic were all injured.
- Although they topped their qualifying group, Croatia dropped points to Wales, Hungary and Azerbaijan. In the Nations League they only won once and lost five, narrowly avoiding relegation.
- However, coach Zlatko Dalic's opinion is that a new wave of players has emerged, including Nikola Vlasic, Josip Brekalo, Filip Uremovic, Bruno Petkovic, Borna Barisic, Dominik Livakovic, Mario Pasalic, Domagoj Bradaric and Duje Caleta-Car.

Beaten...Croatia couldn't exact World Cup revenge when they faced France in the Nations League

TACTICS

While Dalic has many options in attack and midfield (Mateo Kovacic and Milan Badelj included), only keeper Livakovic is currently safe of his place in the back line. Vrsaljko should return to right-back when he is fit, while Dejan Lovren's experience will be required.

STAR MAN



Nikola VLASIC

The form of the ex-Everton midfielder, now at CSKA Moscow, is the primary reason for Ivan Rakitic's retirement.

COACH

Zlatko DALIC

Performs his leadership role magnificently, as he proved during the key moments in Russia.

PLAYER PROFILE

Leader...Luka Modric

LUKA MODRIC

Since the 2006 World Cup in Germany (where Modric made two substitute appearances), Luka has been Croatia's most important player. The national team's performances pretty much depend on him, not only because he is the best Croatian player of all time, but because he is an authority on the field. With the Real Madrid man in their line-up, Croatia are a much stronger force than without him, regardless of the fact that he turned 35 years old last September.

He will most likely go to the European Championship as Croatia's most capped player too, currently standing just one game behind Darijo Srna's record of 134.

While he may not again reach the heights of 2018, when he won the Ballon d'Or, FIFA's Best Player and the World Cup Golden Ball, Modric is a key figure for club and country. Real Madrid still select him for the biggest games; he came off the bench to score in *El Clasico*. And when he runs out for Croatia, Modric is still the main man.

Zdravko Reic

SCOTLAND

Clarke cracks the code to unlock door to major tournament

OVERVIEW

Scotland ended a 22-year wait in the wilderness from any finals – the last being World Cup 1998 – by reaching Euro 2020 with dramatic play-off success against Israel and Serbia.

- Scotland finished third in their group behind Belgium and Russia, but made use of their passport from topping their Nations League group to embrace their third European Championship after Euro '92 and Euro '96.
- Clarke's template has been to make the team hard to beat. But he has a talented generation who have flourished in England, such as Andy Robertson, Kieran Tierney and John McGinn, along with Celtic stars James Forrest, Ryan Christie, Callum McGregor and Leigh Griffiths, who have all enjoyed European experience with their club.
- Status is not important. Stephen O'Donnell was capped when Clarke was at Kilmarnock, while Lyndon Dykes won his first cap while at Livingston.

Ecstasy...Scotland end the long wait for a major tournament with shoot-out success v Serbia

TACTICS

Scotland returned to the three-man defence used to reach Euro '96, allowing defenders Kieran Tierney Andy Robertson to both play on the left-hand side. Scott McTominay's distribution out of defence frees up a place for another midfielder.

STAR MAN

Andy ROBERTSON

Meteoric rise to become one of the best left-backs in Europe. Talismanic captain for Scotland.

COACH

Steve CLARKE

Former Chelsea defender was the supporters' choice to replace Alex McLeish in May 2019. He has delivered.

PLAYER PROFILE

Match-winner...Christie scored in Sarajevo

RYAN CHRISTIE

Secured the gratitude of every Scot with his goal against Serbia, but his emotional post-match interview in Belgrade captured the heart of the nation, too.

The Celtic midfielder's tears struck a chord as he hoped the win would lift the coronavirus cloud that hangs over Scotland. The 25-year-old is now one of the most influential players for club and country, with four goals in 14 caps.

This is no surprise to *World Soccer*, who named Christie the Scottish Newcomer of the Season after he helped his hometown club, Inverness CT, win the Scottish Cup in 2015.

Christie joined Celtic in September 2015 for £500,000 but needed patience. He could not get a place on the bench during Celtic's invincible campaign of 2016-17. It took a couple of loans at Aberdeen for him to find his feet, and he returned to Celtic in 2018-19 to make his breakthrough, scoring the winner in the League Cup final against Aberdeen.

A crisp passer, he has added goals to his game too, including seven in last season's Europa League.

Phil Gordon

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czechs make it seven in a row

OVERVIEW

The Czechs bounced back from a 5-0 thrashing in England in their opening qualifier to claim second place in Group A. The highlight of the campaign was a shock 2-1 win over the Three Lions in the return game in Prague.

● Few teams have had their Euro 2020 preparations as severely affected by coronavirus. At short notice, the Czechs were forced to field an entirely new XI against Scotland in the Nations League in September, and coach Jaroslav Silhavy missed the return game in Glasgow in October after testing positive.

● The Czechs reached the Euro '96 final in England, and won the 1976 championship as part of Czechoslovakia. Since the Czech-Slovak split, the Czech Republic have qualified for all six Euros.

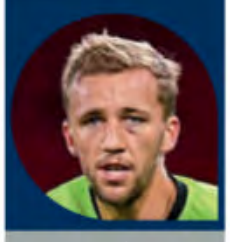
● In a squad short of household names, key players include keeper Tomas Vaclik, full-backs Vladimir Coufal and Jan Boril, midfield engine Tomas Soucek, winger Jakub Jankto and striker Patrik Schick.

Derby...Czech players celebrate beating neighbours Slovakia in the Nations League

TACTICS

Soucek sits deeper than the other two central midfielders in a midfield trio. Captain Borek Dockal's return from injury could force coach Silhavy to drop Hertha Berlin's Vladimir Darida, and centre-back Jakub Brabec could make way for Tomas Kalas.

STAR MAN



Tomas SOUCEK

Tall, energetic midfielder who has flourished in the Premier League since joining West Ham.

COACH

Jaroslav SILHAVY

Level-headed and experienced former defender who coached Liberec and Slavia Prague to Czech League titles.

PLAYER PROFILE

Shock...Schick controls the ball in Czech Republic's 2-1 win over England

PATRIK SCHICK

Tall, handsome and talented, Schick is Czech football's poster boy-in-waiting – tipped for greatness but yet to fulfil his early promise. 25 in January, the powerful yet elegant striker has already seen his share of ups and downs.

A teen sensation in the Czech League, Schick moved to Sampdoria, aged only 20, and almost signed for Juventus a year later. After failing medicals at Juve, he instead joined Roma as one of the most expensive Czech players of all time.

Schick's career stalled in the Italian capital but a loan spell with RB Leipzig put him back on track. A permanent move to their Bundesliga rivals Bayer Leverkusen followed last summer.

First called up to the national team in 2016, the left-sided forward scored on his debut and has since become the Czechs' main threat, with four goals in the Euro 2020 qualifiers.

A thigh injury sidelined Schick for much of the first half of this season but the delayed Euro finals should be the right tournament at the right time. The young pretender now has a chance to prove himself at the highest level.

Sam Beckwith

SPAIN

Thrashing of Germany sends a message to the rest of Europe

OVERVIEW

Spain's doubts were swept away in Seville, with the national team ending a three-game winless run by taking Germany to pieces with a stunning 6-0 Nations League victory in November.

After all the concerns, the shifting line-ups, the laments as the golden era slipped further into the past, and question marks about where the goals were going to come from, they inflicted Germany's biggest defeat since 1931.

It was not just that Spain had found a way through to the final four of the Nations League, it was that they had found a way, full stop. A sense of identity and purpose, some belief: dominating possession, quick to win the ball back, incisive and fast; here at last was a result that made people think that they really could win the European Championship again after their double victory in 2008 and 2012.

Suddenly, this summer is something Spaniards are looking forward to again.

Hammering...celebrating the stunning 6-0 victory over giants Germany last November

TACTICS

Luis Enrique, in his second spell in charge of the national team, has made plenty of personnel changes but one thing has remained clear: his determination to take the game to the opposition. He has plenty of options in his preferred 4-3-3 formation.

STAR MAN

Sergio RAMOS

The beard gets longer and the years go by, but Sergio Ramos is still going strong.

COACH

Luis ENRIQUE

Single-minded and hypercompetitive, Luis Enrique likes winding people up but likes winning even more.

PLAYER PROFILE

Hat-trick hero...Ferran Torres was on fire against Germany

FERRAN TORRES

"Madness," Ferran Torres called it. He stood, the match ball in his hand, grinning having just scored a hat-trick in only his seventh game for the Spanish national team, and against Germany too. A European champion at Under-17 and Under-19 level, the Manchester City attacker has long been seen as the outstanding player of his generation – there is a reason Pep Guardiola wanted him in the first place – but that is not the same thing as expecting him to lead the senior national team. Or, rather, *was* not.

And yet, given that Spain seemed uncertain about their attacking positions (other options include Gerard, Adama Traore, Dani Olmo, Rodrigo and Ansu Fati), given Luis Enrique's belief in him, Guardiola's willingness to play him as a false nine, and with that extraordinary, fearless display against Germany, it seems logical to assume that he now has a big role to play – despite being just 20 years old. Fast, skilful, a good finisher and with great technique, the kid who joined Valencia at eight and had no doubts about departing so soon is a star in waiting.

Sid Lowe

SWEDEN

A new generation waiting to emerge

OVERVIEW

When Zlatan Ibrahimovic announced his retirement back in 2016, many expected it to be the fatal blow for Sweden. Aware of his side's limitations and the lack of stars of such a calibre, coach Janne Andersson focused on minimising the risk and building a strong defensive side.

They do not play attractive football, but after qualifying for their first World Cup since 2006 and going all the way to the quarter-finals in 2018, the Swedes advanced to their third consecutive major tournament, losing only to Spain away and finishing above Norway and Romania in their qualifying group.

The fact that Sweden are still going through a transitional period makes this even more impressive. The attacking potential of young prodigies such as Alexandar Isak, Dejan Kulusevski and Mattias Svanberg – all of them aged 21 or under – could make Andersson give them key roles in the future.

New hope...Mattias Svanberg celebrates scoring his first international goal against Faroe Islands

TACTICS

Their most significant strength is tactical discipline and defensive organisation. With his compact 4-4-2, Andersson focuses on neutralising the opposition and being very direct with the ball. With their talent up front, they can be a challenging task for any side.

STAR MAN

Sebastian LARSSON

The veteran midfielder's experience is crucial for helping the younger generation coming through.

COACH

Janne ANDERSSON

Has transferred his experience as coach of underdogs in the domestic league to the Swedish national team.

PLAYER PROFILE

Leading the line...Isak is Sweden's first-choice striker

ALEXANDER ISAK

"Is the teenage Sweden striker Borussia Dortmund's next great No.9?" asked the Bundesliga's official website two years ago, following an impressive loan spell at Willem II. When it became clear that the answer was no, many feared that Alexandar Isak's career would go downhill.

Prior to that, Isak's career had been on a rapid upwards trajectory. Aged 16, he became the second-youngest scorer in the history of the Swedish league, and a year later become the national team's youngest-ever goalscorer too. When he joined Dortmund for a reported fee of €9 million, he was inevitably dubbed "the new Zlatan".

Isak fell short of expectations in Dortmund, and even after a successful loan spell in the Netherlands, he was sold to Real Sociedad. But the lanky striker has flourished in Spain, regaining his confidence and goalscoring abilities.

In 2019, Isak collected ten caps and became Sweden's established first choice up front. The upcoming Euros will be his first major tournament, and his chance to prove that Dortmund made a big mistake by letting him go.

Sasa Ibrulj

POLAND

Europe's finest striker leads his country to another major tournament

OVERVIEW

For the first time in their history, Poland have qualified for a third major tournament in a row.

In Euro 2016, they reached the quarter-finals, losing a penalty shoot-out to winners Portugal. At home, that was seen as a great success, but they followed it up disappointingly by finishing bottom of their group at the World Cup in Russia two years later.

Adam Nawalka paid for the failure with his job. His replacement, Jerzy Brzeczek, has been criticised by local media – despite achieving qualification with only one defeat – for his style of football. Only Ukraine topped their qualifying group with fewer goals.

In October, his reputation was boosted after a 0-0 draw with Italy and a 3-0 victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina took Poland top of their Nations League group. But November defeats to Italy and the Netherlands led to more questions about his future.

Three in a row...this summer's Euros will be a third consecutive major tournament for Poland

TACTICS

After an unsuccessful experiment with a diamond, Brzeczek has settled on a 4-2-3-1 system, occasionally alternating to 4-4-2. The team's spine has plenty of experience: Szczesny or Fabianski in goal, Glik in defence, Krychowiak in midfield and Lewandowski up front.

STAR MAN

Robert LEWANDOWSKI

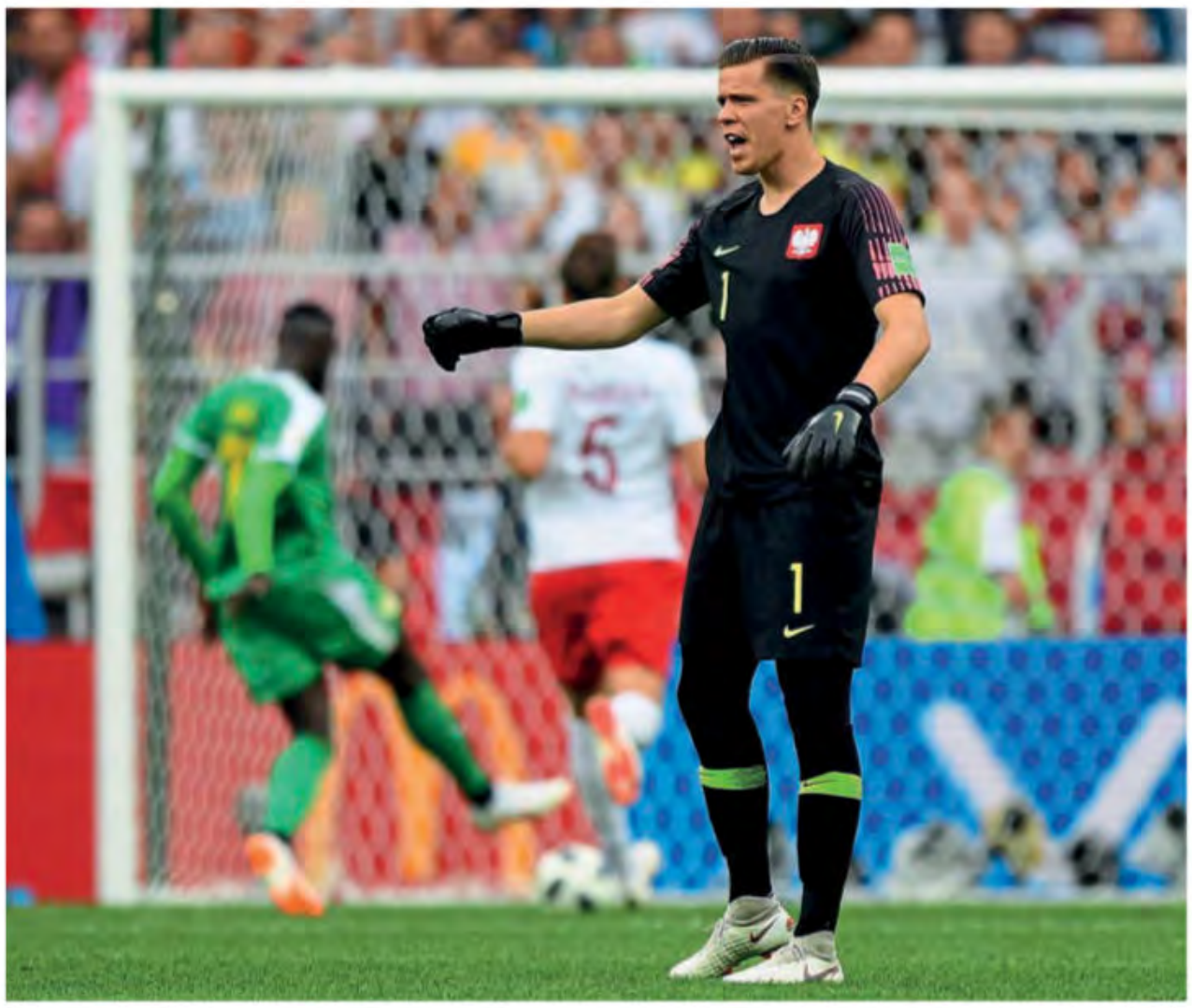
Goalscoring machine and Champions League winner in the form of his life at the age of 32.

COACH

Jerzy BRZECZEK

Coach of Poland since 2018, but without any earlier coaching success with four Polish clubs previous to that.

PLAYER PROFILE



Goalkeeper...Szczesny played two games at the 2018 World Cup

WOJCIECH SZCZESNY

For club and country, Szczesny knows all about sharing goalkeeper duties.

Having joined Juventus from Arsenal (via a loan spell at Roma) in 2017 as a future successor to Gianluigi Buffon, the ex-Gunner still occasionally steps aside for the 42-year-old in spite of being the established first choice, while Poland boss Brzeczek likes to alternate between him and Lukasz Fabianski.

His father Maciej was a goalkeeper of some repute as well, winning seven caps in the 1990s and setting a Polish record by winning five championships with four different clubs (Legia Warsaw, Widzew Lodz, Polonia Warsaw and Wisla Krakow). Thanks to his father's coaching, Szczesny junior is a keeper with excellent reflexes and flexibility, and is comfortable with the ball at his feet.

In the Nations League, Szczesny and Fabianski started three matches each, but by the time Poland meet Slovakia in Dublin on June 14 for their opening game, Brzeczek's policy of alternating between the two should be brought to an end. The Juventus shot-stopper will do everything to ensure that he is first on the teamsheet.

Dariusz Kurowski

SLOVAKIA

Slovaks reach third major finals after extra-time drama in Belfast

OVERVIEW

Slovakia twice put paid to Irish hopes in two dramatic qualifying play-offs for the Euro finals. First with a penalty shoot-out win against the Republic of Ireland in the semis, then with an extra-time victory over Northern Ireland.

- Between the play-off semi-finals and the final, Czech coach Pavel Hapal was sacked and replaced by Stefan Tarkovic, Jan Kozak's assistant at Euro 2016.
- Putting in place his favoured 4-1-4-1 system, Tarkovic was two minutes from reaching the finals when an own goal took the game to extra-time. Michal Duris then hit the winner from the edge of the penalty box to fire Slovakia to their second consecutive Euros.
- With a clean sheet in the play-offs, followed by another against Scotland, Fulham goalkeeper Marek Rodak has earned his starting spot in goal. Former No.1 Martin Dubravka was previously dropped from the squad after breaking curfew while on national duty in 2018.

Nail-biting...Patrik Hrosovsky celebrates Slovakia's dramatic play-off victory in Belfast

TACTICS

Assuming Tarkovic stays in place as coach, his 4-1-4-1 formation uses Stanislav Lobotka as the midfield lynchpin, doing the running for the ageing but wily Marek Hamsik and Juraj Kucka, while Robert Mak and Albert Rusnak provide the width.

STAR MAN

Juraj KUCKA

A veteran of the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2016, the midfielder has played over 200 Serie A games.

COACH

Stefan TARKOVIC

In the national set-up since 2013, Tarkovic was brought in before the play-off final with Northern Ireland.

PLAYER PROFILE

Legend...this may be Hamsik's final international tournament

MAREK HAMSIK

With his trademark Mohawk haircut, national team captain Marek Hamsik is Slovakia's first world star. Key to the renaissance at Napoli, where he made a record number of appearances and lies second in the club's all-time top scorers list above the late, great Diego Maradona, the attacking midfielder had only played six times for Slovan Bratislava when he was whisked off to Brescia as a raw 17-year-old in 2004.

Now seeing out his club career with Dalian Professional in the Chinese Super League, 33-year-old Hamsik is looking to end his imperious reign in national colours on a high at this summer's European Championship.

Visionary and talismanic, Hamsik led Slovakia to a shock 3-2 win over then-world champions Italy at the 2010 World Cup and was equally vital when helping his country qualify for the knockout rounds at Euro 2016. Seeing passes few others do, Hamsik leaves everything on the pitch, a work ethic that has pushed him way beyond the recently-retired Martin Skrtel in national team appearances – with another major tournament still to come.

Peterjon Cresswell

HUNGARY

Another Euros for the Magyars after a thrilling play-off climax

OVERVIEW

Trailing 1-0 to Iceland in the play-off final, Hungary struck twice either side of the 90-minute mark to reach their second consecutive Euros – after previously going 30 years without qualifying for a major tournament.

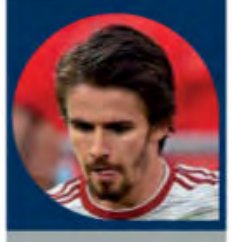
- Despite beating World Cup finalists Croatia in qualifying, Hungary finished fourth in a group of five, yet made the play-offs via the Nations League. As co-hosts, they will play two of their group stage matches at the Puskas Arena.
- Marco Rossi, ex-Honved coach, uses the same 3-5-2 formation that helped win him the Hungarian title in 2017. Under quarantine for the play-off with Iceland, he passed instructions to his assistant, Cosimo Inguscio, from home.
- The scorer of the dramatic winning goal, Dominik Szoboszlai, made his debut in the first qualifier against Slovakia, replacing Laszlo Kleinheisler, whose equally superb strike set up Hungary's qualification for Euro 2016.

Back-to-back...Hungary's play-off heroes celebrate another Euro qualification

TACTICS

The Italian coaching team instructs disciplined defensive midfielder Adam Nagy to control play in front of the defence, rarely venturing into the final third, allowing Dominik Szoboszlai to step into the limelight, while Filip Holender breaks on the left.

STAR MAN



Adam NAGY

Now at Bristol City, defensive midfielder Nagy was snapped up by Bologna after Euro 2016.

COACH

Marco ROSSI

Respected Rossi took Honved to their first league title in 24 years in 2017. National team coach since 2018.

PLAYER PROFILE

Last-gasp...Szoboszlai celebrates his dramatic winning goal against Iceland

DOMINIK SZOBOSZLAI

The clock at Budapest's empty Puskas Arena was ticking towards extra-time when attacking midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai, just turned 20, collected the ball in his own half. Hungary had trailed a steely Iceland all game in this Euro play-off, gaining a last-gasp equaliser through Loic Nego but using all their substitutes. Szoboszlai cut in from the left, as blue shirts scattered invitingly. Ignoring runs left and right, the Red Bull Salzburg star then cracked in a shot from 25 yards that clacked the inside of the post into the far corner of the net. Mayhem.

The Austrian Bundesliga Player of the Season had settled the game in dramatic fashion and sent Hungary to the Euros, two group matches to be staged at this same stadium built to co-host the tournament.

Joining his father's team of Videoton at six years old, Szoboszlai moved from MTK to Red Bull nursery team Liefering in 2016. Now as essential to the national side as the Austrian league champions, Szoboszlai is looking at a big-league transfer – and playing before a home crowd this summer.

Peterjon Cresswell

PORTUGAL

Reigning champions no longer so reliant on Ronaldo

OVERVIEW

After waiting until 2016 for their first major trophy, another one followed just three years later in the inaugural Nations League. As a result, Portugal head to the Euros with a squad packed with match-winning experience.

They couldn't have asked for a tougher group, drawn alongside world champions France and Germany – whom they will face in Munich – while their most winnable fixture, against Hungary, is in Budapest. The Magyars held them to a 3-3 draw at Euro 2016.

Gone are the days of "Cristiano Ronaldo plus ten". Joao Felix, Diogo Jota, Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva are exceptional attacking talents starring for Europe's biggest clubs.

The attritional football that won Euro 2016 has evolved into a more expansive style, yet they have lost none of the defensive solidity or will to win infused by coach Fernando Santos. They are real contenders to retain their crown.

Passing the mantle...Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes is one of Portugal's new leaders

TACTICS

A strong advocate of 4-4-2 for much of his tenure, coach Fernando Santos has drifted towards 4-3-3 recently in order to maximise the formidable array of attacking options at his disposal. Ronaldo and Joao Felix tend to alternate between left-wing and centre-forward.

STAR MAN

Cristiano RONALDO

35 years young and the landmarks keep on coming. Ali Daei's all-time international goal record is in sight.

COACH

Fernando SANTOS

Under Santos, they've only lost four times in 53 competitive matches, winning Euro 2016 and the Nations League.

PLAYER PROFILE

Midfield maestro...William Carvalho

WILLIAM CARVALHO

Portugal boast genuine superstars but apart from Ronaldo, the most consistent and best-performing player over the past two years has been the relatively low-profile William Carvalho.

Known simply as "William" in his homeland, his build and position on the pitch can be deceiving. Fernando Santos has entrusted the Real Betis player with a broader range of duties than a conventional holding midfielder whose remit is primarily to blunt the opposition. William has licence to push up the pitch, especially when paired with the more defensive Danilo. The result is a dynamic performer who fully harnesses his ability to carry the ball forward and pick out team-mates with accurate passes, as well as beefing up what is for the most part a lightweight team in terms of physicality.

William's wonderfully inventive passing range makes him the perfect conduit both for transforming defence to attack, and to keep the attacking momentum in full flow when Portugal are applying pressure, adding yet another layer to their extensive array of offensive weapons.

Tom Kundert

FRANCE

World champions combine exciting youth with grizzled experience

OVERVIEW

France qualified for Euro 2020 by topping Group H, though they failed to beat second-placed Turkey in either of their two meetings.

Didier Deschamps has been in charge since 2012 and led his team to the final of Euro 2016, where *Les Bleus* lost to Portugal in extra-time, before delivering the ultimate prize of the World Cup with a 4-2 victory over Croatia in 2018.

Despite such tremendous success, Deschamps' overly pragmatic style of play means he isn't as revered as you might expect. France will have their work cut out if they're to win Euro 2020, having been drawn alongside holders Portugal and Germany in Group F.

Established stars like Kylian Mbappe, Antoine Griezmann, Raphael Varane and Paul Pogba have been joined by exciting new talents such as Marcus Thuram, Eduardo Camavinga and Houssem Aouar, meaning the world champions cannot be written off.

Young and old...wonderkid Eduardo Camavinga celebrates with attacking stalwart Olivier Giroud

TACTICS

Although coach Deschamps has experimented with alternative formations in the last 18 months, plan A is likely to be the formula that won the World Cup: 4-2-3-1, with a lone striker supported by quick, tricky and technical players.

STAR MAN

Kylian MBAPPE

He's not been at his scintillating best of late, but has the ability to be decisive in any game at any level.

COACH

Didier DESCHAMPS

A prickly man who cares not a jot for the opinions of others. His winning record both as a player and coach speaks for itself.

PLAYER PROFILE

Mercurial talent...Coman

KINGSLEY COMAN

The winger wrote his name into the history books last summer by heading in the only goal of the game in Bayern Munich's Champions League final victory over Paris-Saint Germain, and now has his eye on a similar impact for his country.

Still aged just 24, Coman has already been part of an incredible nine league title-winning teams: two with first club PSG, two with Italian giants Juventus and five with Bayern since arriving in Bavaria in 2015.

His first France cap came in 2015, and the following year he was a regular in their Euro 2016 campaign with six appearances, including one off the bench in the final against Portugal.

It was a surprise then, when Deschamps didn't select him for France's successful World Cup campaign of 2018. But consistent performances for Bayern saw him reinstated for Euro 2020 qualification, and he's gone from strength to strength, scoring three goals in six games. Susceptibility to injury is the only question mark over a player of rare talent.

Howard Johnson

GERMANY

More questions than answers for three-time winners

OVERVIEW

For a squad packed with figures from Bayern Munich's 2019-20 Champions League triumph and an abundance of exciting youngsters, the current iteration of Germany's national side is remarkably inconsistent.

- Their 6-0 thrashing in Spain grabbed headlines, and is bound to leave scars, yet was symptomatic of a general malaise against top-quality opposition: in ten Nations League matches, they have only beaten Ukraine.
- The architect of Germany's World Cup win in 2014, Joachim Low once was untouchable. But he has squandered much of that credibility in the last couple of years, his reputation sullied by his team's early exit from World Cup 2018 and poor displays in the Nations League.
- His inexplicable decision to jettison three of the side's elder statesmen: attacking midfielder Thomas Muller and centre-backs Jerome Boateng and Mats Hummels – has not helped.

Embarrassed...Germany suffered their worst defeat since 1931 in the Nations League v Spain

TACTICS

Low has tended to use a back three recently, usually in a 3-4-3 or 3-4-1-2 system, which many pundits regard as overly cautious. Yet plan B – 4-3-3 – has coincided with defensive lapses in 3-3 draws against Switzerland and Turkey, and that mauling in Spain.

STAR MAN

Joshua KIMMICH

Once a fine right-back, the Bayern ace offers even more in central midfield. Assists galore guaranteed.

COACH

Joachim LOW

After 14 years in the post, Jogi is under pressure like never before. Time for a change?

PLAYER PROFILE

Rising...has Gosens solved Low's left-back problem?

ROBIN GOSENS

Ever since the great Philipp Lahm retired from international duty back in 2014, the left side of Germany's defence has proved something of a Bermuda Triangle for Low, with a raft of candidates falling by the wayside. Now the baton has passed to the 26-year-Gosens, a late-developer whose attacking skills and energy have played such a prominent part in Atalanta's emergence as a force in both Italy and Europe.

Gosens, who made his full debut for Germany in a Nations League encounter with Spain last September, was in the enviable position of being spoilt for choice with his senior international options. Born to a German mother and Dutch father less than ten miles from the Netherlands border, the former Vitesse and Heracles wing-back was headhunted by the KNVB last summer, and even held informal talks with then-*Oranje* head coach Ronald Koeman.

Ultimately, though, he plumped for Germany, the land where he grew up. "I simply feel like a German," he declared.

Nick Bidwell

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ROBERTO MARTINEZ

"There is no such thing as a favourite. It is going to be very competitive"

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez looks ahead to the European Championship and discusses the future of Belgian football

How has your team evolved since the World Cup and the elimination of Brazil in that remarkable quarter-final?
It was one of the targets after the World Cup to grow. We have done that. In the qualification campaign for the Euros, we were able to get an intense feeling in all of our games. We got 30 points out of the ten games, something that had never been done before in Belgium.

We used a bigger group than the one we had in the World Cup. I felt that we needed a deeper squad, so that whenever we missed a player we could still perform in a similar way. The journey of the last two years has allowed us to get more players in each position with a real competitive edge for those starting positions.

At the start of the century Belgium were hard working yet unglamorous; at Russia 2018, they played some of the most exciting football in the tournament. Has the perception about the Belgian national team changed?
Slowly, there is an understanding of the Belgian team, but it goes alongside people and football fans seeing the growth of our players in their clubs as well. The moves of Thibaut Courtois and Eden Hazard have been very interesting. Kevin De Bruyne is a pivotal player at a winning Manchester City side. To be able to see Dries Mertens breaking records in Napoli, to see Romelu Lukaku going to Italy and Thorgan Hazard to Dortmund and even Yannick Carrasco coming back from China: it has been a real evolution for our players.

A lot of neutral football fans identify themselves with these players and when they play for Belgium there is real excitement. Neutral fans enjoy our team play, which is always a fantastic compliment in football. They like the attacking style, the way our team performs and that we adopt a different style from our opponents.

Why did you decide to extend your contract with Belgium last May until the 2022 World Cup?
We always said that our work and project ran until the end of the Euros in 2020, so from the moment the Euros were postponed it was a moment to sit down with the federation and review how we felt, where the team is going and what the challenges in Belgian football are. It was really impressive to feel that we were seeing things in exactly the same way and that the challenges now are to cope with the expectations of being number one in the FIFA ranking and going into the major tournaments.

At the same time, we must take responsibility and develop the next generation – players that were born after 2000: how can we prepare them for the demands of being in this set-up? It is a very ambitious project with the new FA building in Tubize and the development projects. It felt a bit like unfinished business, with the fans that we have behind this team and this generation.

From a personal point of view, I haven't been able to finish here and move on to a new challenge. It felt right to extend the contract and carry on working in the short-term and the long-term as well, and look forward to the Nations League and use it in the best possible way for the Euros.

You have also become the technical director of the Belgian FA. What needs to be done for Belgium to remain at the top?
It is a different proposition from what Belgium faced in 2000. Back then, there was a need to set the identity for Belgian football and to educate players in a specific manner. With successful development, young Belgian players get attention from a lot of clubs and a lot of leagues. Every time, they want to get these players at a younger age. Our challenge is to keep these players in Belgium until they are ready.

There is no set age for them to stay in Belgium because every player has his own evolution, but the players can't leave Belgium when they are not ready to play abroad. That is one of the biggest challenges. For that, we need to educate parents. We need to get the league competitive enough for these players to develop here when they are young. Clubs need the opportunity to give younger players a chance in their first teams, in the Pro League.

Those are the challenges. We need to approach them in the same way as it was done back in 2000, but with a global vision, long-term ambitions and in different areas.

How do you keep up with the likes of France and Germany?
Countries that have four, five or six times the population of Belgium can afford to work in a different way, which is in quantity. They will produce players. In our case, we need to work from the quality point of view. We have a population of 11 million in Belgium and 24 professional clubs. We need to ensure that we don't lose a single talent. The numbers in Belgium don't allow that.

We have to create a different way of preparing players and individual talent. You can't overprotect them and give them an easier path because they simply have the talent. In other countries, the players have to survive the huge competition in every age group to become a professional. That in itself prepares the player in the best possible way.

That is why Belgium has to be very different: we can't afford to develop soft players. They won't be prepared for what is needed in the modern game and be an elite player.

Would the creation of a second division including youth teams help in this respect?
Yes, we can't stand still. It is important to understand we need to carry on improving and give opportunities to young players to develop better. To do that, the level of competition in the leagues has to be improved. We can make the Under-18 and Under-21 teams stronger and that will allow us to keep young talent longer in Belgium. When there are opportunities to make the Pro League stronger you have to sit down, look into it, assess, and consider the pros and the cons.

I am not saying you have to do it. Our leagues, in particular the U21 teams, have to be strong enough to develop players in their age groups. The possibility of playing in a professional league is something that works. In Spain, the Segunda B has the *filiales* [La Liga club's second string, i.e. Barcelona B]. It is a model that works. A lot of nations have that problem; it is not just Belgium. Young players need competition that is as strong as possible.

The 2022 World Cup will be the last tournament for this golden generation.

Do you think a drop-off in talent production is inevitable?
Well, we hope not. It is how you look at the glass – half empty or half full. A lot of people tell me that they can't wait for the next game because watching this current generation play is inspiring. Others think about what we will do when these players retire. We should appreciate that these players have given us real clarity of how to develop young players. It is not just about talent. They had individual careers and that is what made their talent exceptional. They have been able to develop and fulfil their potential.

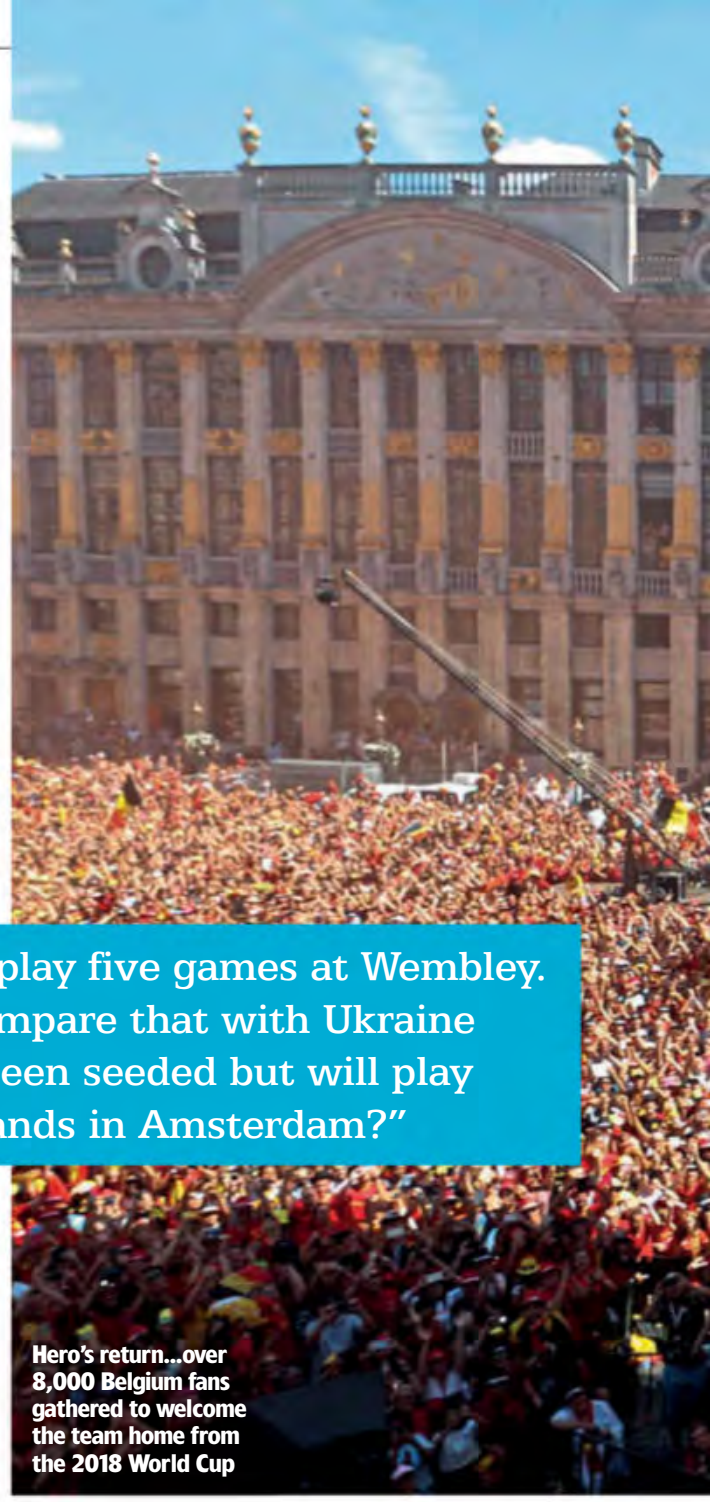
The talent and players will always be there in Belgium, the way youth football works. Now, it is about making sure that these players use that talent in a good way. After this generation, it will be easier to perform. They have had the role models of Kevin De Bruyne, Eden Hazard, Dries Mertens, Romelu Lukaku, Toby Alderweireld and Thibaut Courtois. It is a lot easier than going into the unknown.

We need to use this generation for enjoyment and future information – as a mirror for the younger generation so they can understand the expectations. I want to be positive and I want to believe that the younger players will be prepared to carry on with the expectations that Belgian football has for the future.

Who are some of the younger talents you can see come aboard for the next Euros and the 2022 World Cup?
We have got young players with exceptional futures. Yari Verschaeren has already played for the Red Devils. Jeremy Doku is growing really well. Other players are developing quickly because they are playing first-team football. The environment is positive for the likes of Marco Kana, Elias Cobbaut, Sambi Lokonga. Dodi Lukebakio and Sebastiaan Bornauw are talents who are enjoying development abroad in Germany. We have got very good age groups that are developing at a good pace.

Again, one thing is having the talent; the other thing is allowing this talent to grow. That is why we are taking the long-term view to try to help, but the talent is coming through the ranks.

> "England could play five games at Wembley. How can you compare that with Ukraine who have also been seeded but will play against Netherlands in Amsterdam?"



Hero's return...over 8,000 Belgium fans gathered to welcome the team home from the 2018 World Cup

Moving away from talent education, how has the coronavirus pandemic changed your planning for the Euros?
We had been planning this European Championship for two years and then all of a sudden the postponement of the competition by a year meant a change of focus going into the Nations League.

For us, the Nations League was to prepare the team for the European Championship. In that respect, playing Denmark home and away was perfect because they are in our group at the Euros.

We faced England home and away, and Iceland, whom we have already played. These are games, playing at Wembley, that are perfect to prepare for the Euros.

Then, we will have the qualification campaign for the 2022 World Cup [in March] so, all of a sudden, the qualifiers will become good games in the run-up to the Euros.

Your backline will be a year older – does that concern you?

Top of the world...Belgium ended 2020 as FIFA's No.1-ranked men's team

Mentor...Martinez believes former Belgium captain Vincent Kompany will go on to become a top coach

Well, in football every camp represents a risk. You have players that could get injured or enter a moment of bad form. There is not a single player who plays forever, but, at the same time, these players in the backline are very involved. They still play at a very good level. It is up to them really if we can keep them in those positions. They have huge influences on the younger players in the natural competitive environment that we want to create.

That's healthy. It is not something that worries me. You can't stop a player ageing and you always need to consider that a player comes, grows and retires in the national team. That is an aspect of life.

How do you assess Vincent Kompany's progress as a coach at Anderlecht?
It has been fantastic. It sounds a little bit strange, but Vincent had a perfect introduction to management because he was still playing, still enjoying his football.

He realises that in coaching you learn losing matches. It is very easy when you have got your ideas and experiences and it is working out nicely in the matches and you win. You don't really test yourself. Vincent has gone through a period that will make him a real coach and manager in the future. As painful as it has been at times, Anderlecht and him will reap the benefits. It has been a real learning curve and it is preparing him for the future.

Is it a worry that many of your players will have to play so many matches in the coming months due to the congested calendar?
This is a different situation and we will have to manage that. It will be a matter of sharing that load and assessing every player on an individual basis. It is an abnormal calendar and specific players will get more minutes than others, but we have to be aware of that, in the same way that some of the players who play in the Belgian league hadn't played a game since last March.

What are your thoughts on Group B at Euro 2020, having to play against Denmark, Finland and Russia?
We are very excited about this tournament. It is historic that you have twelve host nations in the same Euros, but there are difficulties with that. If you are not a host, you can be in a disadvantageous position. Belgium was a seeded nation, but we are playing our group games away from home. We have Finland, who will almost be playing at home in Saint Petersburg; Russia at home and Denmark in Copenhagen as well.

So, it is difficult, but this is the price to pay in such a unique format. Again, we need to celebrate that opportunity rather than not seeing that being seeded has become an advantage for us.

Is Euro 2020 the right time for Belgium to carry the mantle of tournament favourites?
You can't just name your favourites in any tournament, that is very subjective – but in this summer's Euros you have twelve hosts and you have got so many different aspects for countries to adapt to the tournament. It is impossible to say. England could play five games at Wembley. How can you compare that with Ukraine who have also been seeded but will play against Netherlands in Amsterdam? We are seeded, but will play two hosts in the group phase. There are so many elements that will make it so unpredictable.

That is what this tournament will be, a celebration of the European Championship. There is no such thing as a favourite nation. It is going to be very competitive. The top four teams in the World Cup were European. That is a measurement of the European Championship. You simply can't pick out favourites.

Is a European Championship more difficult to win than a World Cup?
No, it is more unpredictable. The World Cup is the World Cup. It is all the countries of the world. South American teams adapt very well to the big games and to competing in the big moments.

But the European Championship is also very unpredictable. The level is very similar. You have got the four semi-finalists from Russia 2018, the Nations League winners Portugal and talented nations like Italy, Germany and Spain.

The competitiveness of these nations and the type of football – the majority of these players play in the same league – makes for a very tight tournament, but very different from the World Cup.

Finally, what is the biggest lesson you have learned from the coronavirus pandemic?
Probably, to understand that you can really do things from distance, but I won't take things like hugging your parents or sharing a nice conversation with people you love from a different country for granted ever again.

Interview by Samindra Kunti

MATTHIJS DE LIGT

"We worked hard to get there and now we want to do well"

The Netherlands defender looks ahead to Euro 2020

There aren't many 21-year-olds who will go into this summer's tournament with as much pressure on their shoulders as De Ligt.

Having made his international debut at the age of 17, the Juventus defender has already been a key member of the Dutch squad for the past few years, forming a solid partnership alongside skipper Virgil van Dijk. Yet with the Liverpool man's place at the tournament in doubt following his knee injury, there is every chance that De Ligt will be the Netherlands' first-choice centre-back at Euro 2020 – in spite of a shoulder injury that ruled him out of last autumn's fixtures.

Not that he's unfamiliar with pressure. As the youngest captain in the club's history, the defender led Ajax to a league-cup double and the Champions League semi-finals in 2018-19, before joining Juventus for €75 million.

In his short career, De Ligt has already played under two of his country's finest centre-backs in Ronald Koeman and new boss Frank de Boer. Here, he tells *World Soccer* about the differences between the two, and the Netherlands' chances at this summer's tournament.

What were your thoughts on Ronald Koeman leaving the national team set-up?
Nobody wanted to see him go – but at the same time I think there was a respect for his decision. The chance to coach Barcelona is not an opportunity that you get every day and he obviously felt it was one he could not turn down. We had to move on and we are excited for the future.

How do you expect things to change under Frank de Boer?
He has his own ideas and we are all excited to work under him. He has achieved so much as a player and as a coach with Ajax, and the players want to help him achieve things with the national team now.

Are you excited about working under an Ajax legend in De Boer?
We are all excited. He achieved such great things with Ajax, with Barcelona and is one of the most-capped Dutch players of all time. We all know what he is about and his reputation. Many of the players would have grown up watching him – and even the younger players who don't remember seeing him play live know of his status and everything he has achieved.

De Boer left before you made your Ajax debut, but how much interaction did you have with him before he joined Inter?
I had interaction with him – he was of course involved with the youth team and he has always been a coach who is supportive of the younger players and wants to bring them through. He is prepared to give chances – and it is up to all of us to take them.

What are your thoughts on the Nations League, having reached the final in 2019?
It is the chance for games against top opposition and gives the coach chances to try formations, to give players a chance, and for the team to get to play together. It would have been nice to win but it really does help with preparation as well.

Euro 2020 will be your first major international tournament. Describe your emotions about it.

Mentor...Frank de Boer replaced Ronald Koeman as Netherlands coach in September

It was important – there is relief for the nation and for the fans that we have qualified. We are a nation that should always be represented at World Cups and European Championships but there is no given right. We worked hard to get there and now we want to do well.

It's also the first major tournament for the Netherlands since 2014. Does the squad feel pressure to succeed?
The first feeling is relief but we have not just qualified to make up the numbers. There is always a degree of pressure when playing for the Netherlands, because there is always the expectation we should challenge for international trophies. We know what is expected of us though and we will be ready.

Is the squad feeling confident that they can go far in the tournament?
With any knockout tournament, the first priority always has to be to progress out of the group stage. Most tournaments there is one nation that fails at the group stage that nobody expected to. Once you are out of the groups, you know it is not many games until the final

Final...Netherlands lost 1-0 to Portugal in the 2019 Nations League final

Key man...De Ligt will be a certain starter for the Netherlands

and you can really start to dream.

How has the postponement of the Euros affected the squad? Will it be a help or hindrance in terms of preparation? Memphis Depay is now fit again, for example...
I am not sure it really matters. It was postponed for matters that were out of anybody's hands. Some players might be back but now there might be others who are injured, so I don't think the postponement helped or hindered. It is just one of those things.

How much of a boost will it be playing group games at the Johan Cruyff Arena – even if it ends up being without fans?
At the moment we don't know how the tournament might look in regards to fans being there. When you talk about a European Championship or World Cup, of course you want to play in front of your own supporters – but it will be safety first and we will have to see where we are.

You've been drawn alongside Ukraine, Austria and North Macedonia. Are you happy with your group?
I am happy we have qualified, but I don't think we have been given a kind group or anything like that. They are all nations who we need to treat with respect. There will be no time for complacency – all opposition must be given credit.

What major nations concern you the most going into this summer's tournament – who will be the other favourites to watch out for?
France, Belgium and Germany have very strong teams and I am sure they will all have big ambitions. England also have a very good young team. Spain and Italy can always find a new gear at major tournaments so I think there will be many nations who are going to have the confidence they can win.

What can you tell us about playing in defence alongside Virgil van Dijk for the Netherlands? Is he currently the best defender in the world?
His injury has been unfortunate for him – but I know his character and he will come back stronger. You want to be your own player and have your own style, but when you play with somebody with the quality of Virgil you have to try to learn from him and look at the attributes he has that you know you can improve on. He has been the best defender in the world over the last two years and it's important I learn from him when we play together for the national team.

Is it your ambition to eventually inherit the captain's armband from Van Dijk?
If you ask any player I am sure they will say it would be a dream to captain their country. Virgil still has many more years ahead of him playing at the highest level and I am sure he is not ready to give the armband up yet.

Interview by Donald Deane

"[Van Dijk] has been the best defender in the world over the last two years and it's important I learn from him"

Partners...De Ligt and Virgil van Dijk

HEADING FOR DANGER

Jim Holden examines the worrying links between football and dementia

When news was released that Sir Bobby Charlton had been diagnosed with dementia, it was the tipping point for football to finally become truly serious about a scandal hidden in the shadows for so long.

He was the fifth member of England's 1966 World Cup-winning team to suffer from dementia or related illnesses like Alzheimer's disease, and so joined a heartbreaking list of other famous names from the world of football.

Ferenc Puskas, Sir Alf Ramsey, John Charles, Gerd Muller, Danny Blanchflower, Bob Paisley, Bellini – the captain of Brazil's 1958 World Cup winners – these heroes are just a few among tens of thousands.

The game knew, but the game neglected its idols. The revelation about Bobby Charlton was one tragedy too many. The Professional Footballers' Association set up an instant task force, and there was widespread media reporting not only in the UK but also across the globe. The front page of Italian newspaper *Corriere Della Sera* featured a picture of the 1966 England World Cup team, with a long article on the subject inside.

This was all very welcome, but why had it taken so long?

Compelling evidence about the scale of the issue had been there for two decades and more. The football authorities, as well as players, managers and much of the media, turned a blind eye – perhaps preferring not to believe that heading the ball, such an integral, spectacular and occasionally beautiful aspect of the game, could have such devastating consequences; that it could be deadly.

I first encountered the issue 20 years ago when writing a biography of Stan Cullis, the former England captain and mighty manager of Wolves in the 1950s, who helped to create what is today the Champions League.

He retired early as a footballer fearing that repeated blows to the head, which left him with endless concussions, would gravely damage his health. His last years were spent in a nursing home suffering from dementia. His daughter Susan wrote to the Football Association and did not even receive the courtesy of a reply.

In November 2002 there was an inquest into the death of former England striker Jeff Astle aged 59.

Sir Bobby Charlton... the World Cup winner was diagnosed with dementia in October

Aerial duels...soon to be a thing of the past?

He had been suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's, and a coroner ruled that repeatedly heading footballs had directly led to his death, and that it should be classified as an industrial disease.

The Astle family's grief was plain enough and they were critical of what they felt was lack of action by PFA chief executive Gordon Taylor. He wasn't best pleased about that, and invited me to his office where he showed off bulging files of material the PFA had on the issue. He also revealed that a ten-year in-depth medical study of young apprentice players had begun, in conjunction with the FA, to investigate the potential risks of heading footballs.

It seemed admirable. The FA invited me in, too, and the thrust of their conversation was concern, but also to insist there was no concrete evidence of a link between heading footballs and dementia, whatever the strong anecdotal and circumstantial evidence might suggest. Implicit was the fear that if this was classified as an industrial disease the sport's authorities might face huge compensation claims.

And so the matter was quietly shelved. Change elsewhere was required to begin opening eyes.

American forensic pathologist Bennet Omalu proved in 2005 that a prevalence of gridiron footballers dying early was due to suffering from CTE (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy), a neurodegenerative disease that causes severe and irreparable brain damage. They sustained CTE due to the heavy collisions of the sport. It took many years for his findings to be accepted by the NFL.

Rugby union also had a problem with endless concussions suffered by players. Dr. Willie Stewart, consultant neuropathologist at Glasgow University, began investigating and found cases of CTE in the sport. Again, there was initial resistance to change, but concussion protocols are now dramatically improved and there have been law changes to prevent head-height tackles that caused most danger.

The focus came back to football. Whatever did happen to that research for the PFA/FA? When I asked the FA they told me it finished early because too many of the young footballers involved in the study had simply stopped playing the game.

Nothing had been said in public. No new research had begun or even been contemplated, it seemed, by either organisation. The issue had been shelved once more despite many more former footballers being diagnosed with dementia – Jimmy Hill, Nat Lofthouse, Dave Mackay and 1966 World Cup winners Martin Peters, Ray Wilson and Nobby Stiles.

The Astle family saw the absence of research and action for the scandal it surely was. They began campaigning hard and allowed Jeff Astle's brain to be re-examined in 2014 by Dr. Stewart. This autopsy found he had been suffering from CTE, the cause of this had been repeatedly heading footballs, and that the original diagnosis of Alzheimer's was an error.

Another former England centre-forward, Alan Shearer, was prompted into making a fine BBC documentary on the dangers of heading, *Alan Shearer: Dementia, Football and Me*. A few more eyes opened – just a few – as the stories of Peters, Wilson, Stiles and then Jack Charlton were told.

The FA and PFA commissioned Dr. Stewart to lead a study into the incidence of neurodegenerative disease in football, the largest such study in any sport. Its findings in October 2019 were that former professionals were three and a half times more likely to die of

dementia, and five times more likely to suffer from Alzheimer's. The reaction was shock. It shouldn't have been. It simply shouldn't. This was entirely predictable.

Yet still the world of football could not move quickly. It seemed common sense for concussion substitutes to be allowed, as in rugby, when a player needed to be assessed after a knock to the head. FIFA stalled, expressing concern that unscrupulous teams might abuse such a system. The more urgent matter, surely, is protecting the health of players.

Another year passed, towards the end of 2020, when in the wake of the death of Nobby Stiles, the family of Sir Bobby Charlton made public the fact that he is suffering as well from dementia.

The whole world knows his name and glory. This was the tipping point.

Immediately, the PFA demanded "urgent intervention to reduce and monitor" heading during training sessions. West Ham manager David Moyes suggested using lighter balls in training. The whole of football had its eyes open.

Prevention measures like these are clearly essential. The USA banned heading for all youngsters under the age of 11 back in 2015. In England, a ban on U12s heading balls in training was introduced in early 2020.

Another key aspect for the future is how to deal with incidents during games, when there is a clash of heads for example. One recent example was a collision between Arsenal defender David Luiz and Wolves striker Raul Jimenez in a Premier League match.

Jimenez suffered a fractured skull, requiring surgery. Luiz played on with a bandaged head, still bleeding, until he was substituted at half-time. In days gone by his courage would have been lauded. Now there was widespread anger.

Campaigner...Jeff Astle's wife Laraine

"Football needs to get real and wake up," said TV pundit Shearer. "It needs to get serious – not next month, but now. This has been going on far too long. The concussion protocols in football are not acceptable."

> "Football needs to get real and wake up. It needs to get serious – not next month, but now. This has been going on far too long. The concussion protocols in football are not acceptable."
>
> **Alan Shearer**

Shearer is correct. They need to be strong, they need to be observed, and they need to be accepted. This is a matter of education, of enforcing a change of culture. The Premier League instantly declared it would set up a trial of concussion substitutes.

Perhaps a more difficult terrain is the issue of financial compensation for victims of the past – to players now suffering from dementia or a related illness, and for the families who care for them.

Who pays? How much? Such questions will not have a simple resolution. But with so much money flowing around professional football in the modern age, a path forward can surely be negotiated.

There is a final question, too, one which the game probably fears most of all. Will there have to be a change in the laws of football to force a fundamental change in the way the game is played?

The inescapable logic of all that has been discovered is that we are moving towards a time when there is no heading in the sport. Is the thought uncomfortable? Yes, of course it is. Who has not been thrilled by spectacular and significant headed goals?

It is not as uncomfortable and not as heartbreaking, though, as the shattered lives of so many old heroes and their families.

Sir Geoff Hurst has seen that at close quarters with old team-mates and friends. He supports the ban on youngsters heading balls, and wants to see heading reduced in training and in games. He has said he will donate his brain for research when he dies.

Through his sadness, the only man to score a hat-trick in a World Cup final speaks so much good sense.

Clash...Jimenez and Luiz suffered a sickening clash of heads in November

Concerned... Alan Shearer

Glenn Moore

Euro 2022 qualifying

Divided French side reach the finals

In the end it was straightforward. A typically imperious Wendie Renard header and France were off and running towards a 3-0 win over Austria. After months of rows they had booked their place at the COVID-delayed European Championship finals, to be held in England in the summer of 2022.

Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Iceland and Belgium have also qualified. A further eight places are still to be determined, but of the teams at Euro 2017, only Scotland have been eliminated, while no debutants are confirmed as yet.

Few surprises then, but for France progress was not as smooth as it should have been.

Les Bleues are the great chokers of women's football. For eight successive tournaments they have flattered to deceive – arriving as contenders, departing unfulfilled. It is a team of serial winners built around the great Lyon side, but when they pull on the cockerel something goes awry.

They are yet to appear in a major final and since reaching the 2012 Olympic semi-finals have fallen in the quarter-finals at two World Cups, two European Championships and one Olympics. It is a very thin return for a nation of such talent.

Inevitably such a record prompts anxieties and tension. Corinne Diacre is the fourth coach in seven years and having exited at the quarter-finals in 2019's home-hosted Women's World Cup there is pressure upon her.

The stress of results has, however, been exacerbated by a falling out with several high-profile Lyon players including her captain, Amandine Henry, predecessor Renard, goalkeeper Sarah Bouhaddi and all-time record scorer Eugenie Le Sommer.

The latter was the first to express discontent. Criticised for not following team tactics by Diacre after France's World Cup loss to the USA, Le Sommer said later: "I think I would have fallen off my couch if I was watching live," adding she was not one to disobey instructions.

Renard's book *My Star* then revealed her lingering anger at the manner in which Diacre took the captaincy from her in 2017. Diacre, said Renard, told her: "You are at 40 per cent of your capacities in the French team. In Lyon, you walk, the level is easy, in the European Cup too, but the international level, you have not yet crossed it". Renard said she was "stunned", adding: "Four years of captaincy swept away in less than five minutes."

Diacre said at the time Renard "will never be captain as long as I am here, she's just a player like any other". Noel Le Graet, federation president, brokered an uneasy truce but peace was short-lived as veteran goalkeeper Bouhaddi then declared she would not play again under Diacre. "I would bet both my hands getting cut off that France won't win the Euros if Diacre stays in charge," she said later.

> *Les Bleues* are the great chokers of women's football. For eight successive tournaments they have flattered to deceive – arriving as contenders, departing unfulfilled

When Le Graet congratulated Lyon on winning the Champions League in September, the players took the opportunity to express their discontent with Diacre. A month later Henry was dropped from the squad. The conversation, she said, "lasted 14 or 15 seconds," adding: "I will remember it for the rest of my life. I was shocked. She said, 'Amandine, you know my list comes out tomorrow. You won't be on it in light of your recent performances.' I was silent for two seconds. And then I said, 'Okay. Have a good game. Goodbye.'"

Reigning champions... Netherlands qualified from Group A with ease

Speaking on *Canal+*, Henry said she believed she had been dropped because of the complaint to Le Graet. She was also critical of the atmosphere during the World Cup and called for a summit between players, staff and president, adding: "The time to fix the problems is now, not in three years."

Without Henry the team were held to a goalless draw in Austria, leaving the pair level with 16 points apiece and two matches left. This ended a run of 32 straight wins in qualifying and *L'Equipe*, the French sports paper, in a rare front page on the women's team, asked whether Diacre could survive.

France last lost a qualifier in 2007, scoring 216 goals and conceding eight since, so few expected them to lose to Austria. Nevertheless Le Graet stated the best players should be picked. Diacre recalled Henry and gave her the armband. But there were reports of a confrontation during camp and Henry was substituted after an hour.

Victory, and qualification, eased the pressure on Diacre, who subsequently picked only Amel Majri from Lyon for the Group G dead rubber against Kazakhstan. Renard and Henry watched

Winner...France's Wendie Renard heads her team in front against Austria

from the bench as France won 12-0.

There was less drama elsewhere. The Dutch took in their stride the news that coach Sarina Wiegman would be switching to England after the Olympics, racking up 48 goals in ten matches. In Group B the Danes, beaten finalists in 2017, secured qualification with a 3-1 win in Empoli against Italy, their only serious challengers.

The key contest in Group C was between Norway and Wales. The two-time champions edged both matches 1-0 and Wales were then denied a play-off spot after being held to a brace of draws by Northern Ireland. The latter, beaten 6-0 home and away by Norway, went through courtesy of scoring two away goals to one in their head-to-head. Ultimately Ashley Hutton's 94th-minute equaliser in Newport was the difference.

Sweden won Group F ahead of Iceland who have nevertheless qualified as a best runner-up. Group H went to the last game. Switzerland's 2-1 defeat of Belgium gave them the advantage but they dropped points in Croatia then fell to a heavy defeat in Leuven.

Germany were never in any danger in Group I, Martina Voss-Tecklenburg being able to experiment as they romped to a perfect record. An astonishing 22 different players shared their 46 goals.

Two groups remain undecided. In Group D Poland need to win in Spain to make the play-offs, but that is a tall order. A draw will send *La Roja* through and the Czechs into the play-offs. Scotland went out in Group E after losing back-to-back fixtures against Portugal and Finland with Shelley Kerr forced to coach via Zoom after testing positive for the virus. Finland's home tie with Portugal will decide who qualifies automatically.

Two more runners-up will qualify automatically, the others will play-off for the final three places. Then there is a long wait to the finals, maybe even long enough for the French to find a rapprochement. As Le Graet said: "Being in conflict with the best players in France is not sustainable."

EURO 2022 TEAMS

Qualified: England (hosts), Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, Belgium, Iceland.
Guaranteed play-offs/may qualify automatically: Spain, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Portugal, Finland.
Play-offs: Russia, Northern Ireland, Ukraine.
Still in contention: Poland, Czech Republic.

KEY DATES

Remaining qualifiers: February 2021
Play-offs: April 5-13, 2021
Finals: July 6-31, 2022, England

Round-up

USWNT supporter... Joe Biden

NEW PRESIDENT BACKS EQUAL PAY

The USSF and US women's national team team reached a settlement over the working practices element of their lawsuit giving the women similar conditions to the men's team. This followed Joe Biden's presidential election victory, which raised hopes of a positive resolution in the equal-pay dispute. In May 2020 Biden tweeted to the players: "Don't give up this fight. This is not over yet." He added, to the USSF: "Equal pay now. Or else when I'm president you can go elsewhere for World Cup funding."

HEATH AND PRESS TO KENTUCKY?

Racing Louisville picked up the US rights to Tobin Heath and Christen Press, both currently playing for Manchester United, in the expansion draft. Were the World Cup-winning pair to return to NWSL they would belong to the 2021 debutants. However, it is thought they may be used as a bargaining chip and traded again to 2022 entrants Angel City who, incidentally, have announced they will share stadia with MLS club Los Angeles FC.

LYON & WOLVES IN SHOCK DEFEATS

There were surprise results in France and Germany, with Champions League finalists Lyon and Wolfsburg both losing league matches. Lyon were beaten for the first time in 80 matches in all competitions, a four-year run, when they were defeated by Paris Saint-Germain. Marie-Antoinette Katoto scored the only goal. Lyon have won the last 14 titles with PSG runners-up for the last three seasons.

Upset...PSG ended Lyon's unbeaten streak

Bayern Munich inflicted the first domestic defeat on Wolfsburg since February 2019, defeating the Lady Wolves 4-1. That Wolfsburg became the first team to score against Bayern this season was scant consolation. Wolfsburg have been champions, with Bayern runners-up, for four successive seasons.

New girl... Boquete

MILAN SIGN BOQUETE

Veronica Boquete, Spain's all-time record goalscorer, has signed for Milan from Utah Royals. Italy is the eighth country the 33-year-old has played in and Milan her 14th club. "Hello Italy! Another country, another league, another adventure, another challenge," announced Boquete on Twitter.

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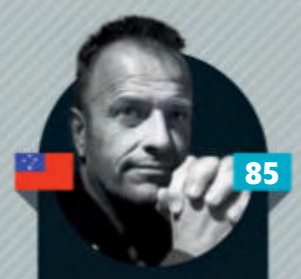
Pakistan



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Netherlands...all 18 Eredivisie club squads

CAF Champions League

MARK GLEESON

Epic end to delayed final

Al Ahly come out on top in dramatic and fiery Cairo derby

It took a late moment of magic to ensure Al Ahly's stranglehold on success in African club competition continued again, in perhaps their most satisfying victory to date.

Magdi Afsha scored with just four minutes remaining, burying a long-range scorcher into the net with a strike worthy of winning any final, never mind the African Champions League.

That it came against arch-rivals Zamalek made it even sweeter for Al Ahly, whose record number of titles in the continent's top club competition now advances to nine and sends them to February's Club World Cup in Qatar.

It also reinforces the Cairo club's position as the most successful in African club football, even though it was their first Champions League title in seven years.

After his cross into the area was cleared, Afsha raced onto the ball, controlled it with his chest, and unleashed a wicked, dipping half-volley from the edge of the box home for a 2-1 victory.

Review

Champions...Al Ahly lift their ninth title

Solo goal...Shikabala had made it 1-1 with an outstanding strike

Seeing red...two players were sent off deep into stoppage-time

Al Ahly, who had been far too strong for Wydad Casablanca in the two-legged semi-finals, went ahead as early as the fifth minute when Amr El Sulaya rose to head home a corner.

But Zamalek were level just past the half-hour mark after a sublime bit of skill from the veteran Mahmoud Shikabalala, who had only made the starting line-up after Youssef Ibrahim tested positive for coronavirus.

Shikabala picked the ball up on the right wing, weaved his way inside, twisting and turning his way past several defenders, before a left-footed shot planted the ball in the top corner.

Zamalek, whose semi-final success had also come against Moroccan opposition, in the form of Raja Casablanca, proved surprisingly feisty and competitive in a game Al Ahly were much fancied to win.

Match-winner... Afsha celebrates his stunning goal

> Afsha's long-range scorcher [was] a strike worthy of winning any final, never mind the African Champions League

But it boiled down to a moment of magic in the end to decide a competition that was supposed to conclude in May but battled to get back on track with the disparate COVID-19 pandemic lockdown rules and regulations across the continent.

There is an intense rivalry between the sides, and tensions spilled over at the end of the game, with Zamalek's Mostafa Mohamed and Al Ahly's Hussein El Shahat both sent off in the sixth minute of stoppage-time.

Both clubs had changed their coaches just weeks before the resumption at the semi-final stage, with Portuguese veteran Jaime Pacheco taking over at Zamalek and Al Ahly hiring Pitso Moismane from South Africa after the Swiss Rene Weiler went home during the pandemic.

Mosimane now joins an elite group of multiple African Champions League-winning coaches.

It was the first time, since the inaugural edition of the old-style Champions Cup in 1965, that the final was played as a single match after the Confederation of African Football, somewhat bizarrely, sought to belatedly emulate what their European counterparts have done for decades.

This time round, it did not matter with the game at the cavernous Cairo International Stadium played behind closed doors (although the final was originally set for Douala, Cameroon), but the success of future one-off finals requires interest from locals and the ability for fans to travel.

This is difficult in achieve in Africa and a future spectacle of half empty stadia in neutral venues for the Champions League final is a very real one.

NOVEMBER 7-DECEMBER 2, 2020

Global diary

Stories from the four corners of the football world

Saturday November 7

PHILIPPINES: United City FC emerge as 2020 Philippines Football League champions after defeating Stallion Laguna 7-1, clinching the title with a game to spare.
INDIA: It's announced that the 2020-21 I-League season will begin on January 9, with 11 teams vying for the trophy.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich come out on top in *Der Klassiker* with a 3-2 victory over rivals Borussia Dortmund to stay top of the Bundesliga. RB Leipzig maintain the pressure by beating Freiburg 3-0, leapfrogging Dortmund into second.

Der Klassiker... Robert Lewandowski celebrates scoring against his old club

SPAIN: Barcelona secure their first win in five La Liga games thanks to Lionel Messi, who comes off the bench to score twice in a 5-2 victory over Real Betis.

Sunday November 8

SOUTH KOREA: Jeonbuk Motors complete the domestic league and cup double for the first time in their history by beating Ulsan Hyundai a 3-2 on aggregate in the 2020 Korean FA Cup final.
VIETNAM: Viettel are crowned champions of Vietnam after Bruno Catanhede's goal proves enough to defeat Saigon 1-0 and stave off the challenge of second-placed Hanoi FC.
CAMEROON: Former Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o escapes uninjured after being involved in a car crash in his home country.
ENGLAND: Manchester City and Liverpool play out a 1-1 draw, with Gabriel Jesus and Mohamed Salah getting the goals. Kevin De Bruyne misses a penalty, meaning the gap between the two sides remains at five points.
USA: Philadelphia Union secure their first-ever Supporters' Shield.
SPAIN: Valencia stun Real Madrid 4-1 at the Mestalla, with Carlos Soler scoring a hat-trick of penalties. Meanwhile, Real Sociedad go top of La Liga by beating Granada 2-0.

Monday November 9

AUSTRALIA: Former West Bromwich Albion midfielder and Scotland international Graham Dorrans joins Western Sydney Wanderers on a two-year deal.
ITALY: Fiorentina fire head coach Giuseppe Iachini and replace him with Cesare Prandelli, the former Italy coach who previously took charge of the Florence-based club between 2005 and 2010.
SPAIN: Celta Vigo become the first La Liga club of the season to change coaches, firing former Brighton and Watford manager Oscar Garcia.

Returning... Fiorentina boss Cesare Prandelli

Tuesday November 10

ENGLAND: Former Plymouth Argyle manager Tony Waiters, who also took charge of the Canadian national team twice, dies aged 83.
USA: CONCACAF announce that the final stages of the federation's Champions League will take place at the Exploria Stadium, home to MLS club Orlando City.
BRAZIL: Rogerio Ceni, the legendary goalscoring goalkeeper, is officially confirmed as the new coach of Flamengo, replacing Domenec Torrent, who was sacked after just three months in charge.

Wednesday November 11

EUROPE: Croatia's Domagoj Vida plays 45 minutes of his team's friendly with Turkey before finding out that he had tested positive for coronavirus. Elsewhere, Finland stun world champions France with a 2-0 victory in Paris.

Thursday November 12

ENGLAND: Albert Quixall, one of Matt Busby's first signings after the Munich air disaster in 1958 and FA Cup winner in 1963, dies aged 87.
CHINA: Jiangsu Suning claim their first-ever Chinese Super League title with a 2-1 victory over the ten men of defending champions Guangzhou Evergrande in the second leg of the 2020 championship play-off final.
EUROPE: In the Euro 2020 play-offs, North Macedonia, Hungary, Slovakia and Scotland all secure the places at the finals.

Friday November 13

ASIA: The AFC confirms that India, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan will move to the next stage of the bidding process to host the 2027 Asian Cup.
ENGLAND: Swindon Town appoint Wigan Athletic manager John Sheridan as their new boss, following the departure of Richie Wellens to Salford City.
AUSTRALIA: Former Athletic Bilbao stalwart Benat joins A-League new boys Macarthur FC, joining former team-mate Markel Susaeta and ex-Blackburn Rovers striker Matt Derbyshire.

Saturday November 14

SOUTH AMERICA: Roberto Firmino's goal gives Brazil a 1-0 win against Venezuela as they continue to top the 2022 World Cup qualification table.
TURKMENISTAN: Altyn Asyr secure a record-breaking seventh successive league title, wrapping up the 2020 championship with three games left.
ENGLAND: Phillip Cocu is sacked by Derby County, with Wayne Rooney taking on a player-manager role assisted by coaches Shay Given, Liam Rosenior and Justin Walker.
EUROPE: Sergio Ramos becomes the most capped European male player of all time, yet also misses two penalties against Switzerland.

Sunday November 15

AFRICA: Sadio Mane seals a 1-0 win for Senegal in Guinea-Bissau to become the second team to qualify for the 2022 Africa Cup of Nations after hosts Cameroon. Elsewhere, Comoros' unlikely challenge for a place at their first-ever finals continues with a 2-1 victory over Kenya.

Monday November 16

BHUTAN: Thimphu City FC are named champions of the 2020 Bhutan Premier League.
ARGENTINA: Former Liverpool, Barcelona, Estudiantes and River Plate midfielder Javier Mascherano announces his retirement from professional football.
WALES: Hollywood stars Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney complete their takeover of National League club Wrexham.

Tuesday November 17

ENGLAND: Former football agent Eric Hall dies aged 73.
EUROPE: Spain inflict Germany's heaviest defeat since 1931 with a devastating 6-0 victory in the Nations League, thanks to a hat-trick from Manchester City forward Ferran Torres. France confirm their place at the finals with a 4-2 victory over Sweden, while the clash between Switzerland and Ukraine is ➤

Samoa

STEVE MENARY

Samoa looking to bridge the gap

Tiny island nation gears up for World Cup qualifiers

Long wait...Samoa have only competed in one competition since June 2016

For a team that has managed one competition since June 2016, the eventual start of the Oceania World Cup qualifying tournament cannot come soon enough.

After losing to Papua New Guinea in June 2016 in a 2018 World Cup qualifier, Samoa have only had a flurry of games at last year's Pacific Games. Three heavy defeats and a 2-0 win over Tonga were tough preparation for the World Cup qualifiers in 2021 but technical director Jess Ibrom is positive about the future.

"There is huge potential from Samoa to bridge the gap between other countries in the Pacific," says Ibrom. "There are moments of sporadic success from these Polynesian countries and this is usually down to a solid preparation phase of training leading up to international fixtures or tournaments."

Marooned in New Zealand due to the pandemic, Ibrom has been preparing for the qualifiers with online sessions delivered via two huge interactive TV screens. Around 80 per cent of Samoa's squad will be drawn from the leagues on the two islands, Savai'I and Upolu, which have nearly 30 clubs and separate leagues.

Samoa's overseas players are spread across New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Hawaii, and getting the team together can be difficult.

Striker Andrew Mobberley, who plays for Albany United on Auckland's North Shore and has ten caps and two goals for Samoa, says: "Often the federation want players to be involved in camps leading up to tournaments. Because we aren't professionals and have full-time jobs it is difficult to have enough time to come together and generate team spirit. That being said, Samoan people are very welcoming and even spending a few days with the team you feel as if you've been together for months."

Many Samoans instead play rugby professionally overseas and Mobberley plays semi-professionally in NRFL Division 1, but making the step up to the full-time game is tough. He adds: "Football is a far more technical game than rugby and learning those abilities when you are young are key for your development. As players don't receive the required training, by the time they are older it becomes far more difficult to compete with players that have. Therefore, making the leap into professional football is extremely hard."

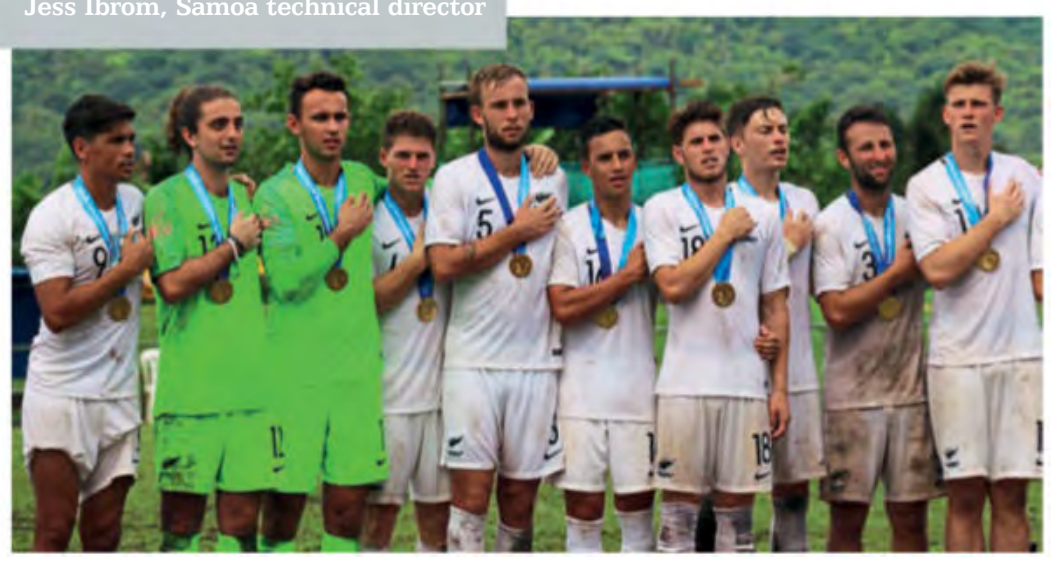
Ibrom is looking to change this and has the backing of the government in recognition of a sport that is outstripping both codes of rugby.

"In Samoa we have a more robust grassroots and competitions program than rugby," says Ibrom. "The difference is that in football we need aspirational players that are playing at a higher level abroad. This way the younger players that are developing through the game have players both male and female they can aspire to follow."

Ibrom is looking further afield for players who would provide the sort of role model that A-League and ISL superstar Roy Krishna did for Fiji. New Zealand Under-17 international Marko Stamenic, who has signed for Danish side FC Copenhagen, qualifies for Samoa and would be perfect if he could be persuaded to switch from the All Whites to the land of his ancestors for the start of World Cup qualifying.

> "We need aspirational players that are playing at a higher level abroad"
>
> Jess Ibrom, Samoa technical director

Photos credit: Football Federation Samoa



In action...Samoa will be up against the likes of New Zealand in qualifying

➤ called off after three Ukrainians test positive for coronavirus.
AFRICA: Mali and Tunisia join Senegal in qualifying for AFCON 2022, with Algeria also joining them the day before.

Wednesday November 18

QATAR: The AFC Champions League East region restarts in Qatar. Dr. Abdulwahab Almusleh, head of the Medical Committee for the 2020 AFC Champions League, says that Qatar remains fully prepared on the health and safety front to host the event in light of the coronavirus situation around the world.

Thursday November 19

UZBEKISTAN: Pakhtakor become Uzbekistan Super League champions for the second season in a row, and a record-extending 13th time overall.
ENGLAND: Pep Guardiola signs a two-year contract extension with Manchester City. Meanwhile in the Women's Super League, Matt Beard leaves his role as head coach of West Ham United by mutual consent, and Tottenham Hotspur appoint England assistant coach Rehanne Skinner to replace Karen Hills. In the EFL, Paul Tisdale replaces Ben Garner as Bristol Rovers manager.
FIFA: FIFA propose maternity cover for the women's game in order to protect players, with 14 weeks cover on at least two thirds of their salary the suggested regulation.

Friday November 20

FRANCE: Monaco come from 2-0 down to beat Paris Saint-Germain 3-2, with half-time substitute Cesc Fabregas the hero, scoring the winner in the 84th minute.

Saturday November 21

ENGLAND: Tottenham Hotspur beat Manchester City 2-0 to go top of the Premier League after nine games played, while London rivals Chelsea win 2-0 at Newcastle United to go second.
GERMANY: On the day that he is named the European Golden Boy by Italian newspaper *Tuttosport*, Erling Haaland scores four goals in a 5-2 victory for Borussia Dortmund over Hertha Berlin, closing the gap to Bayern Munich at the top of the league.
SPAIN: Atletico Madrid's unbeaten start to the season continues ➤

China

CAMERON WILSON

Jiangsu Suning win the Chinese Super League crown

Alex Teixeira stars as Jiangsu Suning defeat Guangzhou Evergrande in the championship play-off stage final

A year like no other provided a surprise champion in the Chinese Super League as Jiangsu Suning won their maiden championship in a campaign truncated by the coronavirus.

The team from China's ancient capital of Nanjing prevailed 2-1 on aggregate over two legs at a neutral stadium against defending champions Guangzhou Evergrande. Italian international Eder and former Shakhtar Donetsk playmaker Alex Teixeira did the damage to bring home only the club's second major trophy after its 2015 Chinese FA Cup win.

Back in January, pre-COVID, few would have predicted a new name on the trophy this year. However, unlike their European counterparts, most leagues in East Asia were in the midst of their close season when the coronavirus struck,

History...Jiangsu Suning celebrate winning the CSL for the first time

The format meant Jiangsu could win the title despite finishing eight points behind, and losing both their regular stage matches to Guangzhou Evergrande

which minimised disruption, and in China's case made the chances of an upset more likely in 2020 due to format changes.

Originally slated for a late February kick-off, CSL 2020 was put on hold as China was paralysed with the outbreak of COVID-19. For months many doubted the season would begin at all, given that extreme caution is the hallmark of Chinese officialdom. However, with the virus more or less contained, the first round finally kicked off four months late in July.

With so much time lost, the Chinese FA, no strangers to making all manner of sudden and bizarre rule changes during normal times, put this ability to good use to come up with a genuinely creative format to cram games in. The 16-team league was split into two groups, each group being based in one city. Teams played each other twice, with the top four from each group moving to a championship play-off stage, and the bottom four, relegation play-offs. The end result was a format which made the best of a bad situation. However, it meant Jiangsu could win the title despite finishing eight points behind, and losing both their regular stage matches to Guangzhou Evergrande, and Tianjin TEDA avoided relegation by winning a play-off match against Shenzhen, having won none of their 14 league stage games.

As is often the case in China, much of the focus was on events off the pitch. This year was no different, thanks to the virus. Sports headlines in September spoke of psychological pressure and isolation felt by the players, having by that point spent two months living in a single hotel with all other players and staff from other clubs in their respective group with barely any person-to-person contact with the outside world. Matches were played behind closed doors for the first half of the season, with the rules being relaxed somewhat to allow just a few thousand fans into the cavernous stadiums in Dalian and Suzhou, the two cities hosting each group. With most supporters tuning in online, the canned crowd noises added by television producers were widely mocked, but the general consensus was that it was just good to have local football of some kind to take in. VAR – now in its second year of use in China – continued to be a hugely controversial topic among local football pundits with countless examples of incorrect decisions resulting from its use, and several glaring fouls and errors standing after not being reviewed in the first place.

On the pitch, quality and intensity of play varied considerably, albeit for very understandable reasons, some games appeared to be glorified training matches, whilst others delivered the moments of drama and excitement of a normal season, such as Sun Shilin's stunning last-minute equaliser from outside the box for Shenhua in a typically tempestuous and foul-ridden Shanghai derby against SIPG in the championship play-offs. Guangzhou Evergrande's Wei Shihao, the heir to Wu Lei's crown as China's top domestic player, had a strong season, scoring eight goals, and it was business as usual in the scorers chart. The top ten were all foreign offensive players, led by Beijing Guoan's Cedric Bakambu, formerly of Villarreal, with 14 goals to his name.

In what was generally viewed as a successful year all things considered, the closing act of the season was its most poignant. Wuhan Zall, hailing from the central Chinese city where the coronavirus first broke out, and who ended up being stuck outside China for three months as a result, clinched their CSL survival after narrowly edging out Zhejiang Greentown of China's second tier league over two legs, scraping a 3-2 aggregate win.

Impressive... former Shakhtar playmaker Alex Teixeira was the star of the show

With the virus now under control, a relative state of normality has returned to everyday life in China. But unfortunately, football looks to remain under COVID's shadow. Reports in the local football press suggest the CSL will use the same format in 2021 and fans will not be allowed to return in normal numbers until such times as vaccinations are widespread.

Pakistan

JOHN DUERDEN

Football's sleeping giant

Football in Pakistan continues to be held back as tussles behind the scenes continue

Most Asian national teams have not played since 2019 but this is a fairly normal situation for Pakistan, one of the idlest international sides in the world. Indeed, from March 2015 to September 2018, the Green Shirts did not play at all.

Pakistan have played only eight games in the past five years. This is not some ruse to improve FIFA rankings as the comatose giants are, as of November 2020, 200th in the world with only nine nations below them in the standings.

Part of the reason for the inaction is due to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). Combining qualification for the Asian Cup and the World Cup has reduced the number of competitive games. The format doesn't help either with the 12 lowest-ranked teams in Asia playing off against each other home and away. Win, and you can be grouped with Japan or South Korea and enjoy eight valuable games.

But if you lose, as Pakistan did to Yemen in March 2015 and Cambodia in June 2019, then the roads to Russia 2018 and Qatar 2022 (as well as the 2019 and 2023 Asian Cups) are over after just 180 minutes of action.

There hasn't been much in the way of domestic action to fall back on either. The last games in the 14-team Pakistan Premier League, itself the first campaign for four years, finished on January 13, 2019 – almost two years ago. That title was won by Khan Research Laboratories. The team were denied entry to the AFC Cup, Asia's second-tier cup competition, because no Pakistani team meets the required club-licence regulations.

One would hope that Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) officials would be straining every sinew to put all of this right but they have been distracted by years of infighting.

In June 2015, Faisal Saleh Hayat, an influential figure in Asian football, was relieved of his duties as PFF president, a position he had held since 2003 and was accused of embezzlement and incompetence. He went ahead and stood in an election soon after anyway and won a fourth term.

To cut a long story relatively short, the courts got involved which meant that FIFA then stepped in to ban Pakistan in October 2017. The suspension was lifted nine months later as the Lahore courts handed control back to the PFF.

Battle...Pakistan's Zainul Abideen Ishaque in action against Vietnam at the 2018 Asian Games

Yet in December 2018 a judge ruled that there should be another election. This time Hayat refused to stand, saying it was another example of third-party interference, and instead Syed Ashfaq Hussain Shah won. The AFC refused to recognise the victory, still regarding Hayat, who was elected to the AFC's vice-presidency in April 2019, as the rightful leader of Pakistan football.

In June 2019, FIFA decided to establish a Normalisation Committee to take control of the day-to-day management of PFF and to move towards free and transparent elections by the end of 2020.

In April, FIFA received a letter from the Pakistan government which expressed concerns that the committee, who are answerable to the Swiss-based body, are not neutral.

"The simple fact that there is a Normalisation

Indeed, from March 2015 to September 2018, the Green Shirts did not play at all

Committee in Pakistan, as it is in other countries, is a consequence of a situation that was already very, very complicated and difficult," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in September.

"We want to collaborate and we hope that with good services from AFC and FIFA in support of the Normalisation Committee, we can overcome the current complicated situation and bring back normality and football the way that Pakistan deserves it."

The tussles behind the scenes have been going on for so long and have been so divisive that it is no surprise that football itself has received even less attention than usual.

With no prospect of competitive games for Pakistan until the start of qualification for the 2026 World Cup, fans are desperately looking for some action. They will have to make do, for the foreseeable future, with the South Asian Cup. The regional competition is one of the less-important in Asia and takes place roughly every two years. The 2020 one was cancelled, and it remains to be seen whether Bangladesh will be able to host in 2021.

FIFA...Gianni Infantino has established a Normalisation Committee in Pakistan

It also remains to be seen if free and fair elections can be held and whether a transparent and accountable future lies ahead for Pakistan. Without it, the country of 200 million will continue to be the biggest underachiever in world football.

➤ with a 1-0 win over Barcelona thanks to a goal from winger Yannick Carrasco at the Wanda Metropolitano. Real Madrid are held to a 1-1 draw in Villarreal, while Real Sociedad stay top of La Liga.

Sunday November 22

ITALY: Milan remain top of Serie A after a 3-1 victory at Napoli, four points clear of holders Juventus in fourth. Sassuolo's positive start continues with a 2-0 win over Verona, taking them up to second.

Monday November 23

BULGARIA: CSKA Sofia appoint former West Ham, Crystal Palace and Newcastle United manager Alan Pardew as technical director.
ENGLAND: Theo Walcott hits his first league goal for Southampton since returning to the club – 14 years and 347 days after his last strike for the Saints.
CAF: Head of CAF Ahmad Ahmad is banned for five years by FIFA.

Tuesday November 24

QATAR: FIFA President Gianni Infantino confirms that 22 national teams will participate in the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup in Qatar.
USA: After they failed to get the better of Philadelphia Union in five meetings in 2020, New England Revolution secure their revenge in the biggest game of the season, winning 2-0 in the MLS play-offs.
ENGLAND: Ex-England manager Steve McClaren is appointed technical director by his former club Derby County, his fifth spell at the club in a variety of roles.
EUROPE: Barcelona confirm their place in the last 16 of the Champions League with a 4-0 win over Dynamo Kiev, as do Juventus, Chelsea and Sevilla. Elsewhere, Manchester United beat Istanbul Basaksehir 4-1 at Old Trafford.

Wednesday November 25

FIFA: The 2020 FIFA Best Women's Player award nominations are revealed, with WSL stars Lucy Bronze, Pernille Harder, Ji So-yun, Sam Kerr and Vivianne Miedema included on the 11-woman shortlist.
AUSTRALIA: Former Aston Villa striker Rudy Gestede signs for Melbourne Victory ahead of the 2020-21 A-League season.
ARGENTINA: Carlos Tevez announces he will retire in 2021 to embark on a career in football politics at Boca Juniors. ➤

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Africa Cup of Nations update

Senegal are the first team to qualify for Cameroon 2022, while Ghana and Nigeria still have work to do

Holders Algeria, Mali, Senegal and Tunisia offer an already familiar feel to the next Africa Cup of Nations finals line-up after they secured qualification with two rounds of preliminaries still to play.

But other heavyweight contenders like Ghana and Nigeria were tripped up in their bid for early qualification, although are still expected to reach the 24-team finals in Cameroon in early 2022.

Nigeria dramatically let slip a four-goal lead, all scored in the opening 29 minutes, at home to Sierra Leone while Ghana got caught by a late sucker punch in the Sudan.

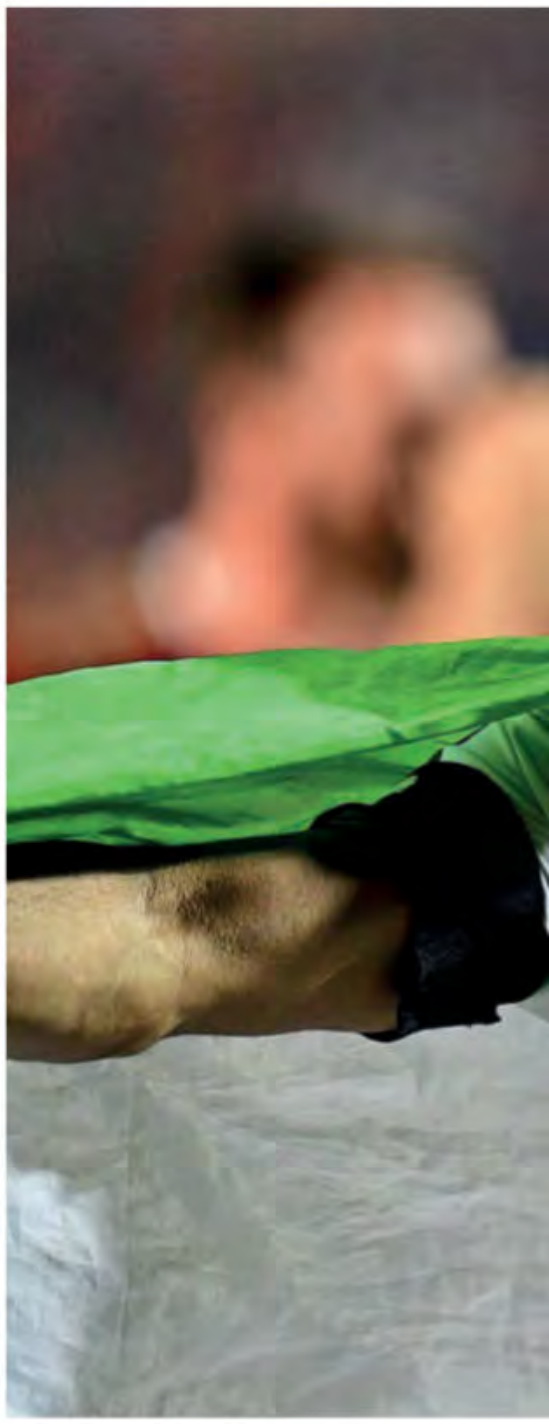
A victory for the Comoros Islands set off exuberant celebrations in the tiny island nation as they moved close to historic qualification while South Sudan, unlikely to qualify, managed a rare win in a competitive international.

COVID-19 infections meant Mohamed Salah could not play for Egypt and saw Morocco striker Youssef El Arabi quarantined in Cameroon, delaying his return to Greek club Olympiakos, who protested angrily to FIFA. But the Confederation of African Football said only 30 players tested positive, less than one percent of the 4,146 tests carried on the teams and their entourages.

Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr has had an assurance about his future from the Super Eagles' football association after fury from the fans over two draws with Sierra Leone. At home they romped into a 4-0 lead, including a double for Alex Iwobi, but the visitors slowly hauled them in before Danish-based forward Alhaji Kamara's dramatic equaliser in the 86th minute. Nigeria had to stay cloistered in their changing room for several hours afterwards, before the area around the stadium in Benin City was cleared of irate home fans seeking to vent their anger on the team bus. The return game four days later was a tepid goalless draw to add to the firestorm around the coach, although Nigeria should still qualify comfortably from Group L.

A double from skipper Andre Ayew saw Ghana to a 2-0 win over Sudan in Cape Coast and they were on course to book their finals berth in the return clash in Khartoum until Mohamed Abdel Rahman popped up to head home two minutes into stoppage-time and postpone the party.

Tunisia set a new record by qualifying for a 15th successive tournament by drawing away in Tanzania. It ended their 100 per cent record in Group J but the point in Dar-es-Salaam was enough to ensure a top-two finish. Equatorial Guinea are now in second place in the group after a double win over Libya, despite having to scramble for a new coach when their proposed deal with former Portuguese international and Charlton Athletic defender Jorge Costa fell through. They appointed Juan Micha, who saw his side cope from 2-1 down with one minute to go to beat Libya 3-2 in Cairo and then again 1-0 in Malabo for a much-needed six-point haul.



Match-winner... Algeria's Riyad Mahrez celebrates after winning the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations

➤ **JAPAN:** Kawasaki Frontale clinch the J.League title after hammering second-place Gamba Osaka 5-0.
EUROPE: Liverpool suffer a rare Anfield defeat, losing 2-0 to Atalanta. Bayern Munich and Manchester City secure their places in the last 16, but Inter's qualification hopes are dealt a major blow after a 2-0 defeat to Real Madrid.

Thursday November 26

EUROPE: Celtic crash out of the Europa League after a 4-1 defeat to Sparta Prague. Rangers draw 2-2 with Benfica and Jamie Vardy scores a 95th-minute equaliser for Leicester City in Braga, with Arsenal and Tottenham securing comfortable victories over Molde and Ludogorets respectively.
SCOLTAND: Gary Holt resigns as head coach of Scottish Premiership side Livingston.

Friday November 27

MEXICO: Ecuador international and former Manchester United winger Antonio Valencia joins Mexican side Queretaro on a free transfer.

Saturday November 28

PORTUGAL: Much-travelled Portuguese player and coach Vitor Oliveira dies aged 67.
ENGLAND: Liverpool's trip to Brighton ends in drama, with VAR awarding the home side a 93rd-minute penalty just moments after Sadio Mane has a goal ruled out for a fractional offside. Pascal Gross dispatches the spot-kick to seal a 1-1 draw, but the Reds remain top.
ITALY: Benevento hold Juventus to a 1-1 draw – their fifth of the season – with Alvaro Morata sent off in the 97th minute.
SPAIN: Eden Hazard picks up yet another injury as Real Madrid lose at home to Alaves. Atletico Madrid maintain their title challenge momentum with a 1-0 victory in Valencia.
FRANCE: PSG are held to a 2-2 draw at home to Bordeaux, with former players Hatem Ben

Missing...Egypt's Mohamed Salah tested positive for coronavirus in November

Senegal, the only side left with a 100 per cent record in the qualifiers, were the first country to book their place, besides the hosts, as Sadio Mane scored in the home and away wins over Guinea-Bissau in Group I. The winner in the return match away in Bissau came late in the game and opened the door for Congo to now possibly pip Guinea-Bissau to second place in the group after they took four points from their two matches with Eswatini.

Mali booked their place with home-and-away wins over Namibia and will likely be accompanied from Group A by Guinea, for who Naby Keita scored arguably the best goal of November's qualifiers in their away game in Chad.

Riyad Mahrez was in sublime form for Algeria as they beat Zimbabwe 3-1 at home and were 2-0 ahead in the return in Harare before it ended in a draw. Zimbabwe are an ever-improving side and to see them picked apart at will by the Algerians suggests the holders will be well fancied to retain their title at the next finals.

The Comoros, who have only been playing international football since 2004, are one point away from a first-ever place at the finals after beating Kenya 2-1 in Moroni.

Heavyweight contenders like Ghana and Nigeria were tripped up in their bid for early qualification

The Gambia are moving closer to a maiden appearance, too, after beating Gabon 2-1 at home in Banjul. Their airport authorities detaining the Gabon side in the airport after their midnight arrival, forcing them to sleep on the floor for several hours before being allowed to go to their hotel, may have aided a home victory.

But Gambia claim Gabon did not want to do the obligatory COVID tests and that was the reason for their detention. But it was an unnecessary, and ugly, incident that went viral thanks to Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's Twitter and Instagram feeds that caused African football much embarrassment.

Arfa and Yacine Adli combing to score the equaliser.

Sunday November 29

ENGLAND: Pressure builds on manager Mikel Arteta after Arsenal lose 2-1 at home to Wolves. Meanwhile Edinson Cavani scores a 92nd-minute winner to seal a 3-2 win for Manchester United at Southampton.

Monday November 30

ENGLAND: Edinson Cavani is forced to apologise after thanking a friend and referring to them as "*negrito*" in an Instagram post.
SPAIN: Former Atletico Madrid captain Gabi announces his retirement from the game.

Tuesday December 1

CANADA: Greg Vanney, the most successful coach in the history of Toronto FC, leaves the club after almost six years in charge of the Canadian outfit.
EUROPE: For the second time in the group stage, Shakhtar Donetsk upset Real Madrid, this time with a 2-0 victory. Inter boost their qualification hopes with a 3-2 win over Borussia Monchengladbach, while Liverpool qualify with a 1-0 win at home to Ajax.

Wednesday December 2

NETHERLANDS: Feyenoord's Dick Advocaat confirms he will retire at the end of the season after 34 years as a coach.
COLOMBIA: Carlos Quieroz is sacked as head coach of the national team after a disappointing start to the 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign.
EUROPE: Fred is sent off as Paris Saint-Germain win 3-1 at Manchester United. In the same group, RB Leipzig beat Istanbul Basaksehir in a 4-3 thriller, while elsewhere France striker Olivier Giroud scores four goals as Chelsea hammer Sevilla 4-0.
ENGLAND: Carlisle United beat Salford City 2-1 in front of 2,000 fans in the country's first non-trial professional game since the sport was suspended on March 13.

NETHERLANDS: EREDIVISIE 2020-21

AJAX

GOALKEEPERS
1 Maarten **STEKELENBURG** (38) 22.09.82
16 Kjell **SCHERPEN** (20) 23.01.00
24 Andre **ONANA** (Cmr) (24) 02.04.96
33 Dominik **KOTARSKI** (Cro) (20) 10.02.00

DEFENDERS
2 Jurrien **TIMBER** (19) 17.06.01
3 Perr **SCHUURS** (21) 26.11.99
5 Sean **KLAIBER** (26) 31.07.94
12 Noussair **MAZRAOUI** (Mar) (23) 14.11.97
15 Devyne **RENSCH** (17) 18.01.03
17 Daley **BLIND** (30) 09.03.90
31 Nicolas **TAGLIAFICO** (Arg) (28) 31.08.92

MIDFIELDERS
4 Edson **ALVAREZ** (Mex) (23) 24.10.97
6 Davy **KLAASSEN** (27) 21.02.93
8 Ryan **GRAVENBERCH** (18) 16.05.02
11 Quincy **PROMES** (28) 04.01.92
18 Jurgen **EKKELENKAMP** (20) 05.04.00
20 Mohammed **KUDUS** (Gha) (20) 02.08.00
21 Lisandro **MARTINEZ** (Arg) (22) 18.02.98
25 Kenneth **TAYLOR** (18) 16.05.02
26 Victor **JENSEN** (Den) (20) 08.02.00

FORWARDS
7 David **NERES** (Bra) (23) 03.03.97
9 Klass Jan **HUNTELAAR** (37) 12.08.83
10 Dusan **TADIC** (Srb) (32) 20.11.88
19 Zakaria **LABYAD** (Mar) (27) 09.03.93
23 Lassina **TRAORE** (Bfa) (19) 12.01.01
30 Brian **BROBBEY** (18) 01.02.02
32 Hassane **BANDE** (Bfa) (22) 30.10.98
39 **ANTONY** (Bra) (20) 24.02.00

COACH
Erik **TEN HAG** (50) 02.02.70

AZ

GOALKEEPERS
1 Marco **BIZOT** (29) 10.03.91
16 Hobie **VERHULST** (27) 02.04.93
30 Mees **BAKKER** (19) 11.03.01
55 Beau **REUS** (19) 31.10.01
65 Elber **EVORA** (Cpv) (21) 02.12.99
66 Andre **KRUL** (33) 08.05.87

DEFENDERS
2 Jonas **SVENSSON** (Nor) (27) 06.03.93
3 Pantelis **CHATZIDIAKOS** (Gre) (23) 18.01.97
4 Ron **VLAAR** (35) 16.02.85
5 Owen **WIJNDAL** (21) 28.11.99
15 Bruno **MARTINS INDI** (28) 08.02.92
19 Juan **CASTILLO** (20) 13.01.00
22 Timo **LETSCHERT** (27) 25.05.93
26 Yukinari **SUGAWARA** (Jpn) (20) 28.06.00
27 Ramon **LEEUWIN** (33) 01.09.87
40 Maxim **GULLIT** (19) 20.05.01
51 Tijs **VELTHUIS** (18) 12.01.02

MIDFIELDERS
6 Fredrik **MIDTSJO** (Nor) (27) 11.08.93
8 Teun **KOOPMEINERS** (22) 28.02.98
10 Dani **DE WIT** (22) 28.01.98
18 Hakon **EVJEN** (Nor) (20) 14.02.00
20 Jordy **CLASIE** (29) 27.06.91
21 Kenzo **GOUDMIJN** (19) 18.12.01
23 Mohamed **TAABOUNI** (18) 29.03.02
24 Tijjani **REIJNDERS** (22) 19.07.98
25 Thijs **OOSTING** (20) 02.05.00
48 Fedde **DE JONG** (17) 13.06.03

FORWARDS
7 Calvin **STENGS** (22) 18.12.98
9 Myron **BOADU** (19) 14.01.01
11 Jesper **KARLSSON** (Swe) (22) 25.07.98
14 Ferdy **DRUIJF** (22) 12.02.98
17 Zakaria **ABOUKHLAL** (Mar) (20) 18.02.00
28 Albert **GUDMUNDSSON** (Isl) (23) 15.06.97
32 Des **KUNST** (21) 12.10.99
44 Yusuf **BARASI** (Tur) (17) 31.03.03

COACH
Pascal **JENSEN** (47) 02.05.73

ADO DEN HAAG

GOALKEEPERS
1 Luuk **KOOPMANS** (27) 18.11.93
22 Robert **ZWINKELS** (37) 04.05.83
35 Youri **SCHOONDERWALDT** (20) 13.03.00

DEFENDERS
2 Milan **VAN EWIJK** (20) 08.09.00
3 Peet **BIJEN** (25) 28.01.95
4 Boy **KEMPER** (21) 21.06.99
7 Andrei **RATIU** (Rou) (22) 20.06.98
15 Dario **DEL FABRO** (Ita) (25) 24.03.95
19 Shaquille **PINAS** (22) 19.03.98
25 Jamal **AMOFA** (22) 25.11.98
43 Lassana **FAYE** (22) 15.06.98
51 Gianni **ZUIVERLOON** (33) 30.12.86

MIDFIELDERS
5 Ravel **MORRISON** (Jam) (27) 02.02.93
6 Dante **RIGO** (Bel) (22) 11.12.98
8 John **GOOSSENS** (32) 25.07.88
10 Ilay **ELMKIES** (Isr) (20) 10.03.00
11 Samy **BOURARD** (Bel) (24) 29.03.96
14 Kees **DE BOER** (20) 13.05.00
16 Jonathan **MULDER** (19) 02.01.02
23 **PASCU** (Esp) (20) 02.04.00
26 Sem **STEIJN** (19) 17.11.01
28 Maarten **RIEDER** (21) 29.09.99
36 Michael **MULDER** (19) 10.01.01

FORWARDS
9 Jonas **ARWEILER** (Ger) (23) 10.04.97
17 Nikolaos **KARELIS** (Gre) (28) 24.02.92
18 David **PHILIPP** (Ger) (20) 10.04.00
20 Vicente **BESUIJEN** (19) 10.04.01
21 Bilal **OULD-CHIKH** (23) 28.07.97
24 Evan **ROTTIER** (18) 11.02.02
27 Yahya **BOUSSAKOU** (20) 04.03.00
29 Michiel **KRAMER** (32) 03.12.88
31 Ricardo **KISHNA** (25) 04.01.95
33 Amine **ESSABRI** (19) 11.09.01
34 Amar **CATIC** (Bih) (21) 21.01.99

COACH
Ruud **BROOD** (58) 19.10.62

EMMEN

GOALKEEPERS
1 Felix **WIEDWALD** (Ger) (30) 15.03.90
16 Robin **JALVING** (20) 11.04.00
26 Dennis **TELGENKAMP** (33) 09.05.87
93 Stefan **VAN DER LEI** (27) 05.03.93

DEFENDERS
2 Collin **SEEDORF** (25) 01.05.95
3 Keziah **VEENDORP** (23) 17.02.97
4 Nick **BAKKER** (28) 21.07.92
5 Miguel **ARAUJO** (Per) (26) 24.10.94
14 Ferhat **GORGULU** (29) 28.10.91
18 Denis **GRANECNY** (Cze) (22) 07.09.98
22 Caner **CAVLAN** (28) 05.02.92
23 Glenn **BIJL** (25) 13.07.95
30 Desevio **PAYNE** (USA) (25) 30.11.95
34 Ricardo **VAN RHIJN** (29) 13.06.91

MIDFIELDERS
7 Simon **TIBBLING** (Swe) (26) 07.09.94
10 Sergio **PENA** (Per) (25) 28.09.95
13 Behadil **SABANI** (Kvx) (20) 26.01.00
19 Ben **SCHOLTE** (19) 10.08.01
20 Michael **CHACON** (26) 11.04.94
21 Hilal **BEN MOUSSA** (28) 22.05.92
24 Lucas **BERNADOU** (Fra) (20) 24.09.00

FORWARDS
6 Anco **JANSEN** (31) 09.03.89
8 Michael **DE LEEUW** (34) 07.10.86
9 Marko **KOLAR** (Cro) (25) 31.05.95
11 Nikolai **LAURSEN** (Den) (22) 19.02.98
12 Luciano **CARTY** (19) 02.10.01
15 Lentini **CACIANO** (Cuw) (19) 15.08.01
25 Sekou **SIDIBE** (Bel) (19) 05.05.01
32 Robbert **DE VOS** (24) 26.05.96

COACH
Dick **LUKKIEN** (48) 28.03.72

FEYENOORD

GOALKEEPERS
1 Justin **BIJLOW** (22) 22.01.98
21 Nick **MARSMAN** (30) 01.10.90
30 Ramon **TEN HOVE** (22) 03.03.98
48 Thijs **JANSEN** (19) 29.11.01

DEFENDERS
2 Bart **NIEUWKOOP** (24) 07.03.96
3 Sven **VAN BEEK** (26) 28.07.94
4 Marcos **SENESI** (Arg) (23) 10.05.97
5 Ridgeciano **HAPS** (27) 12.06.93
14 George **JOHNSTON** (Sco) (22) 01.09.98
15 Tyrell **MALACIA** (21) 17.08.99
22 Lutsharel **GEERTRUIDA** (20) 18.07.00
25 Uros **SPAJIC** (Srb) (27) 13.02.93
33 Eric **BOTTEGHIN** (Bra) (33) 31.08.87

MIDFIELDERS
6 Mark **DIEMERS** (27) 11.10.93
8 Leroy **FER** (30) 05.01.90
20 Joao **TEIXEIRA** (Por) (27) 18.01.93
23 Orkun **KOKCU** (Tur) (19) 29.12.00
28 Jens **TOORNSTRA** (31) 04.04.89
59 Jordy **WEHRMANN** (21) 25.03.99

FORWARDS
7 Luciano **NARSINGH** (30) 13.09.90
9 Nicolai **JORGENSEN** (Den) (29) 15.01.91
10 Steven **BERGHUIS** (29) 19.12.91
11 Bryan **LINSSEN** (30) 08.10.90
17 Luis **SINISTERRA** (Col) (21) 17.06.99
19 Robert **BOZENIK** (Svk) (21) 18.11.99
27 Christian **CONTEH** (Ger) (21) 27.08.99
41 Naoufal **BANNIS** (18) 11.03.02
58 Dylan **VENTE** (21) 09.05.99

COACH
Dick **ADVOCAAT** (73) 27.09.47

Dangerous...Steven Berghuis was joint-top scorer in the 2019-20 Eredivisie after netting 15 goals for Rotterdam giants Feyenoord

FORTUNA SITTARD

GOALKEEPERS
1 Yanick **VAN OSCH** (23) 24.03.97
40 Joshua **WEHKING** (Ger) (20) 20.04.00
41 Tom **HENDRIKS** (18) 14.05.02
77 Alexei **KOSELEV** (Mda) (27) 19.11.93

DEFENDERS
2 Martin **ANGHA** (Sui) (26) 22.01.94
4 Branislav **NINAJ** (Svk) (26) 17.05.94
5 Roel **JANSSEN** (30) 16.06.90
12 Clint **ESSERS** (23) 21.01.97
18 Mike **VAN BEIJNEN** (21) 07.03.99
33 Jaroslaw **JACH** (Pol) (26) 17.02.94
35 George **COX** (Eng) (22) 14.01.98
44 Lazaros **ROTA** (Gre) (23) 23.08.97

MIDFIELDERS
6 Jorrit **SMEETS** (25) 25.03.95
10 Mats **SEUNTJENS** (28) 17.04.92
14 Tesfaldet **TEKIE** (Swe) (23) 04.06.97
22 Adnan **UGUR** (Bel) (19) 28.06.01
23 Ben **RIENSTRA** (30) 05.06.90
24 Nassim **EL ABLAK** (Mar) (20) 07.01.00
27 Samuel **MOUTOUSSAMY** (Cod) (24) 12.08.96

FORWARDS
7 Lisandro **SEMEDO** (Cpv) (24) 12.03.96
8 Zian **FLEMMING** (22) 01.08.98
9 Sebastian **POLTER** (Ger) (29) 01.04.91
11 Emil **HANSSON** (Swe) (22) 15.06.98
17 Djibril **DIANESSY** (Mli) (24) 29.03.96

COACH
Sjors **UTLEE** (33) 23.05.87

GRONINGEN

GOALKEEPERS
1 Sergio **PADT** (30) 06.06.90
24 Nigel **BERTRAMS** (27) 08.01.93
25 Jan **DE BOER** (20) 20.05.00

DEFENDERS
2 Damil **DANKERLUI** (Sur) (24) 24.08.96
3 Bart **VAN HINTUM** (33) 16.01.87
4 Wessel **DAMMERS** (25) 01.03.95
5 Ko **ITAKURA** (Jpn) (23) 27.01.97
17 Miguel **ANGEL LEAL** (Esp) (23) 01.02.97
22 Gorkem **CAN** (Tur) (20) 04.05.00
46 Thomas **POLL** (19) 28.08.01
48 Leonel **MIGUEL** (19) 24.03.01

MIDFIELDERS
6 Azor **MATUSIWA** (22) 28.04.98
7 Ramon Pascal **LUNDQVIST** (Swe) (23) 10.05.97
8 Sam **SCHRECK** (Ger) (21) 29.01.99
18 Ahmed EL **MESSAOUDI** (Mar) (25) 03.08.95
26 Daniel **VAN KAAM** (20) 23.06.00
31 Tomas **SUSLOV** (Svk) (18) 07.06.02

FORWARDS
9 Jorgen Strand **LARSEN** (Nor) (20) 06.02.00
10 Arjen **ROBBEN** (36) 23.01.84
11 Mo EL **HANKOURI** (Mar) (23) 01.07.97
14 Patrick **JOOSTEN** (24) 14.04.96
15 Gabriel **GUDMUNDSSON** (Swe) (21) 29.04.99
21 Alessio **DA CRUZ** (23) 18.01.97
27 Thijs **DALLINGA** (20) 03.08.00
33 Joel **VAN KAAM** (18) 08.03.02
34 Kian **SLOR** (18) 23.03.02
35 Remco **BALK** (19) 02.03.01

COACH
Danny **BUIJS** (38) 21.06.82

HEERENVEEN

GOALKEEPERS
1 Erwin **MULDER** (31) 03.03.89
23 Jan **BEKKEMA** (24) 09.04.96
24 Jaimy **KROESEN** (17) 27.03.03

DEFENDERS
2 Sherel **FLORANUS** (22) 23.08.98
3 Jan Paul **VAN HECKE** (20) 08.06.00
4 Joaquin **FERNANDEZ** (Uru) (21) 22.01.99
5 Lucas **WOUDENBERG** (26) 25.04.94
14 Ibrahim **DRESEVIC** (Kvx) (23) 24.01.97
25 Pawel **BOCHNIEWICZ** (Pol) (24) 30.01.96
27 Stefan **WESTRA** (19) 12.01.01
29 Timo **ZAAL** (16) 09.02.04
31 Guus **OFFERHAUS** (19) 03.01.01

MIDFIELDERS
10 Oliver Batista **MEIER** (Ger) (19) 16.02.01
13 Stanislav **SHOPOV** (Bul) (18) 23.02.02
15 Sieben **DEWAELE** (Bel) (21) 02.02.99
17 Rami **HAJAL** (Swe) (19) 17.09.01
18 Hamdi **AKUJOBI** (20) 12.01.00
19 Jan **RAS** (21) 28.01.99
20 Joey **VEERMAN** (22) 19.11.98
21 Rodney **KONGOLO** (22) 09.01.98
35 Djenahro **NUNUMETE** (18) 28.01.02
36 Nordin **TAHBOUN** (19) 17.02.01
40 Yoram **BOERHOUT** (15) 05.04.05

FORWARDS
7 Ulysses **LLANEZ** (USA) (19) 02.04.01
8 Benjamin **NYGREN** (Swe) (19) 08.07.01
9 Henk **VEERMAN** (29) 26.02.91
11 Mitchell **VAN BERGEN** (21) 27.08.99
16 Arjen **VAN DER HEIDE** (19) 19.11.01
26 Rein **SMIT** (19) 05.01.01
37 Couhaib **DRIOUECH** (18) 17.04.02

COACH
Johnny **JANSEN** (45) 02.03.75

HERACLES

GOALKEEPERS
1 Janis **BLASWICH** (Ger) (29) 02.05.91
16 Michael **BROUWER** (27) 21.01.93
21 Daniel **MESENHOLER** (Ger) (25) 24.07.95
26 Koen **BUCKER** (24) 18.06.96

DEFENDERS
2 Tim **BREUKERS** (33) 04.11.87
3 Giacomo **QUAGLIATA** (Ita) (20) 19.02.00
4 Robin **PROPPER** (27) 23.09.93
5 Marco **RENTE** (Ger) (23) 25.02.97
13 Mats **KNOESTER** (22) 19.11.98
19 Navajo **BAKBOORD** (21) 29.01.99
22 Mateo **LES** (Cro) (20) 25.03.00
23 Noah **FADIGA** (Bel) (21) 03.12.99
24 Elias **OUBELLA** (Ger) (19) 24.05.01
34 Jeff **HARDEVELD** (25) 27.02.95

MIDFIELDERS
6 Orestis **KIOMOURTZOGLOU** (Ger) (22) 07.05.98
8 Teun **BIJLEVELD** (22) 27.05.98
10 Rai **VLOET** (25) 08.05.95
14 Luca **DE LA TORRE** (USA) (22) 23.05.98
15 Lucas **SCHOOFS** (Bel) (23) 03.01.97
20 Kasper **LUNDING JAKOBSEN** (Den) (21) 17.07.99
31 Rohat **AGCA** (19) 03.09.01

FORWARDS
7 Jeremy **CJINTJE** (Cuw) (22) 08.01.98
9 Sinan **BAKIS** (Tur) (26) 02.04.94
11 Silvester **VAN DER WATER** (24) 30.09.96
17 Adrian **SZOKE** (Hun) (22) 01.07.98
18 Ismail **AZZAOUI** (Bel) (22) 06.01.98
30 Mohamed **AMISSI** (Bdi) (20) 03.08.00
37 Delano **BURGZORG** (22) 07.11.98

COACH
Frank **WORMUTH** (Ger) (60) 13.09.60

PSV

GOALKEEPERS
13 Lars **UNNERSTALL** (Ger) (30) 20.07.90
16 Vincent **MULLER** (Ger) (20) 23.08.00
21 Maxime **DELANGHE** (Bel) (19) 23.05.01
38 Yvon **MVOGO** (Sui) (26) 06.06.94

DEFENDERS
4 Nick **VIERGEVER** (31) 03.08.89
5 Timo **BAUMGARTL** (Ger) (24) 04.03.96
22 Denzel **DUMFRIES** (24) 18.04.96
24 Armando **OBISPO** (21) 05.03.99
28 Olivier **BOSCAGLI** (Fra) (23) 18.11.97
31 Philipp **MAX** (Ger) (27) 30.09.93
33 Jordan **TEZE** (21) 30.09.99
39 Luis **FELIPE** (Bra) (19) 17.05.01

MIDFIELDERS
6 Ibrahim **SANGARE** (Civ) (23) 02.12.97
8 Jorrit **HENDRIX** (25) 06.02.95
10 Mohamed **IHATTAREN** (18) 12.02.02
11 Adrian **FEIN** (Ger) (21) 18.03.99
14 Marco **VAN GINKEL** (28) 01.12.92
15 Erick **GUTIERREZ** (Mex) (25) 15.06.95
17 Mauro **JUNIOR** (Bra) (21) 06.05.99
18 Pablo **ROSARIO** (23) 07.01.97
27 Mario **GOTZE** (Ger) (28) 03.06.92
30 Ryan **THOMAS** (Nzl) (26) 20.12.94
37 Richard **LEDEZMA** (USA) (20) 06.09.00
40 Emmanuel **MATUTA** (Bel) (18) 22.02.00
49 Mathias **KJOLO** (Nor) (19) 27.06.01
55 Ismael **SAIBARI** (Mar) (19) 18.07.01

FORWARDS
7 Eran **ZAHAVI** (Isr) (33) 25.07.87
9 Donyell **MALEN** (21) 19.01.99
19 Cody **GAKPO** (21) 07.05.99
20 Maxi **ROMERO** (Arg) (21) 09.01.99
23 Noni **MADUEKE** (Eng) (18) 10.03.02
29 Joel **PIROE** (21) 02.08.99

COACH
Roger **SCHMIDT** (Ger) (53) 13.03.67

SPARTA ROTTERDAM

GOALKEEPERS
Tim **COREMANS** (29) 10.04.91
Michael **FABRIE** (23) 11.11.97
Maduka **OKOYE** (Nga) (21) 28.08.99
Benjamin **VAN LEER** (Idn) (28) 09.04.92

DEFENDERS
Dirk **ABELS** (23) 13.06.97
Tom **BEUGELSDIJK** (30) 07.08.90
Augustin **DRAKPE** (19) 08.12.01
Lorenzo **FONSECA** (Cpv) (22) 17.11.98
Jeffry **FORTES** (Cpv) (31) 22.03.89
Michael **HEYLEN** (Bel) (26) 03.01.94
Aaron **MEIJERS** (33) 28.10.87
Mica **PINTO** (Lux) (27) 04.06.93
Delano **VIANELLO** (18) 14.09.02
Bart **VRIENDS** (29) 09.05.91

MIDFIELDERS
Adil **AUASSAR** (34) 06.10.86
Wouter **BURGER** (19) 16.02.01
Deroy **DUARTE** (21) 04.07.99
Laros **DUARTE** (23) 28.02.97
Abdou **HARROUI** (22) 13.01.98
Sven **MIJNANS** (20) 09.03.00
Bryan **SMEETS** (28) 22.11.92

FORWARDS
Emanuel **EMEGHA** (17) 03.02.03
Mario **ENGELS** (Ger) (27) 22.10.93
Danzell **GRAVENBERCH** (26) 13.02.94
Reda **KHARCHOUCH** (25) 27.08.95
Lennart **THY** (Ger) (28) 25.02.92

**Sparta Rotterdam do not have squad numbers – they line up for every game with shirt numbers 1-11 only*

COACH
Henk **FRASER** (54) 07.07.66

TWENTE

GOALKEEPERS
16 Joel **DROMMEL** (24) 16.11.96
22 Jeffrey **DE LANGE** (22) 01.04.98
30 Ennio **VAN DER GOUW** (19) 01.01.01

DEFENDERS
4 Julio **PLEGUEZUELO** (Esp) (23) 26.01.97
5 Gijs **SMAL** (23) 31.08.97
15 Kik **PIERIE** (20) 20.07.00
17 Jayden **OOSTERWOLDE** (19) 26.04.01
23 Tyronne **EBUEHI** (Nga) (25) 16.12.95
24 Nathangelo **MARKELO** (21) 07.01.99
35 Mees **HILGERS** (19) 13.05.01
43 Dario **DUMIC** (Bih) (28) 30.01.92

MIDFIELDERS
6 Wout **BRAMA** (34) 21.08.86
8 Luka **ILIC** (Srb) (21) 02.07.99
18 Lindon **SELAHI** (Alb) (21) 26.02.99
19 Ramiz **ZERROUKI** (22) 26.05.98
20 Godfried **ROEMERATOE** (21) 19.08.99
32 Jesse **BOSCH** (20) 01.02.00
37 Thijs **VAN LEEUWEN** (19) 15.07.01
40 Casper **STARING** (19) 01.02.01

FORWARDS
7 Vaclav **CERNY** (Cze) (23) 17.10.97
9 **DANILO** (Bra) (21) 07.04.99
10 Lazaros **LAMPROU** (Gre) (23) 19.12.97
11 Queensy **MENIG** (25) 19.08.95
14 Alexander **JEREMEJEFF** (Swe) (27) 12.10.93
21 Halil **DERVISOGLU** (Tur) (21) 08.12.99

COACH
Ron **JANS** (62) 29.09.58

UTRECHT

GOALKEEPERS
1 Maarten **PAES** (22) 14.05.98
16 Thijmen **NIJHUIS** (22) 25.07.98
31 Fabian **DE KEIJZER** (20) 10.05.00
32 Eric **OELSCHLAGEL** (Ger) (25) 20.09.95
50 Joey **HOUWELING** (20) 07.04.00

DEFENDERS
2 Mark **VAN DER MAAREL** (31) 12.08.89
3 Justin **HOOGMA** (22) 11.06.98
5 Leon **GUWARA** (Ger) (24) 28.06.96
13 Emil **BERGSTROM** (Swe) (27) 19.05.93
14 Willem **JANSSEN** (34) 04.07.86
20 Giovanni **TROUPEE** (22) 20.03.98
21 Django **WARMERDAM** (25) 02.09.95
25 Tommy **ST. JAGO** (20) 03.01.00
34 Christopher **MAMENGI** (19) 03.04.01

MIDFIELDERS
6 Adam **MAHER** (27) 20.07.93
8 Joris **VAN OVEREEM** (26) 01.06.94
10 Simon **GUSTAFSON** (Swe) (25) 11.01.95
18 Justin **LONWIJK** (21) 21.12.99
22 Sander **VAN DE STREEK** (27) 24.03.93
23 Bart **RAMSELAAR** (24) 29.06.96
24 Odysseus **VELANAS** (22) 05.06.98
28 Urby **EMANUELSON** (34) 16.06.86
38 Davy **VAN DEN BERG** (20) 04.02.00

FORWARDS
7 Gyrano **KERK** (25) 02.12.95
9 Adrian **DALMAU** (Esp) (26) 23.03.94
11 Eljero **ELIA** (33) 13.02.87
15 Daniel **ARZANI** (Aus) (21) 04.01.99
19 Mimoun **MAHI** (Mar) (26) 13.03.94
26 Othmane **BOUSSAID** (Bel) (20) 07.03.00
29 Moussa **SYLLA** (Fra) (21) 25.11.99

COACH
Rene **HAKE** (49) 18.12.71

VITESSE

GOALKEEPERS
22 Remko **PASVEER** (38) 08.11.83
23 Bilal **BAYAZIT** (21) 08.04.99
24 Jeroen **HOUWEN** (24) 18.02.96
43 Job **FROELING** (18) 15.04.02

DEFENDERS
2 Eli **DASA** (Isr) (28) 03.12.92
3 Danilho **DOEKHI** (22) 30.06.98
5 Max **CLARK** (Eng) (24) 19.01.96
6 Jacob **RASMUSSEN** (Den) (23) 28.05.97
18 Tomas **HAJEK** (Cze) (29) 01.12.91
32 Maximilian **WITTEK** (Ger) (25) 21.08.95
39 Enzo **CORNELISSE** (17) 01.01.03
41 Brend **LEEFLANG** (19) 22.10.01
42 Million **MANHOEF** (18) 03.01.02

MIDFIELDERS
8 Sondre **TRONSTAD** (Nor) (25) 26.08.95
10 Riechedly **BAZOER** (24) 12.10.96
20 Thomas **BRUNS** (28) 07.01.92
21 Matus **BERO** (Svk) (25) 06.09.95
27 Idrissa **TOURE** (Ger) (22) 29.04.98
36 Patrick **VROEGH** (21) 29.11.99
40 Daan **HUISMAN** (18) 26.07.02
47 Nouri **CHEUNG** (18) 15.05.02

FORWARDS
7 Lois **OPENDA** (Bel) (20) 16.02.00
9 Oussama **DARFALOU** (Alg) (27) 23.09.93
11 Armando **BROJA** (Alb) (19) 10.09.01
14 Oussama **TANNANE** (Mar) (26) 23.03.94
15 Filip Moller **DELAVERIS** (Nor) (20) 10.12.00
16 Roy **BEERENS** (33) 22.12.87
17 Hilary **GONG** (Nga) (22) 10.10.98
29 Thomas **BUITINK** (20) 14.06.00
44 Enrico Duenas **HERNANDEZ** (19) 23.02.01

COACH
Thomas **LETSCH** (Ger) (52) 26.08.68

VVV-VENLO

GOALKEEPERS
1 Thorsten **KIRSCHBAUM** (Ger) (33) 20.04.87
16 Delano **VAN CROOIJ** (29) 05.06.91
22 Bram **VERBONG** (21) 23.12.99
30 Jens **CRAENMEHR** (18) 30.04.02

DEFENDERS
2 Tobias **PACHONIK** (Ger) (25) 04.01.95
3 Arjan **SWINKELS** (36) 15.10.84
4 Roy **GELMI** (Sui) (25) 01.03.95
5 Steffen **SCHAFER** (Ger) (26) 01.05.94
14 Christian **KUM** (35) 13.09.85
17 Tristan **DEKKER** (22) 27.03.98
18 Stan **VAN DIJCK** (20) 07.10.00
26 Lukas **SCHMITZ** (Ger) (32) 13.10.88

MIDFIELDERS
6 Danny **POST** (31) 07.04.89
8 Zinedine **MACHACH** (Fra) (24) 05.01.96
9 Ante **CORIC** (Cro) (23) 14.04.97
10 Vito **VAN CROOIJ** (24) 29.01.96
15 Simon **JANSSEN** (20) 25.09.00
20 Aaron **BASTIAANS** (18) 04.04.02
21 Evert **LINTHORST** (20) 03.03.00
23 Nezar **S'RIFI** (Bel) (20) 15.07.00
24 Wassim **ESSANOUSSI** (17) 28.10.03
42 Lars **NABBE** (18) 13.01.02

FORWARDS
7 Guus **HUPPERTS** (28) 25.04.92
11 Georgios **GIAKOUMAKIS** (Gre) (26) 09.12.94
12 Joshua **JOHN** (Aru) (32) 01.10.88
19 Yahcuroo **ROEMER** (19) 22.07.01
25 Jafar **ARIAS** (Cuw) (25) 16.06.95
27 Torino **HUNTE** (30) 14.12.90

COACH
Hans **DE KONING** (60) 05.04.60

RKC WAALWIJK

GOALKEEPERS
1 Etienne **VAESSEN** (25) 26.07.95
22 Mike **GRIM** (24) 07.09.96
31 Kostas **LAMPROU** (Gre) (29) 18.09.91

DEFENDERS
2 Jurien **GAARI** (Cuw) (27) 23.12.93
3 Melle **MEULENSTEEN** (21) 04.07.99
5 Paul **QUASTEN** (Cze) (35) 13.03.85
15 Lars **NIEUWPOORT** (26) 29.11.94
20 Thierry **LUTONDA** (Bel) (20) 27.10.00
32 Nigel **LANGRAS** (19) 13.01.01
33 Teun **VAN GRUNSVEN** (21) 30.10.99
34 Luuk **WOUTERS** (21) 08.06.99
59 Ahmed **TOUBA** (Bel) (22) 03.03.98

MIDFIELDERS
4 Vurnon **ANITA** (31) 04.04.89
6 Nicolas **OLSAK** (Arg) (29) 25.11.91
8 Anas **TAHIRI** (Mar) (25) 15.05.95
10 Richard **VAN DER VENNE** (28) 16.05.92
12 Hans **MULDER** (33) 27.04.87
16 Ayman **AZHIL** (Mar) (19) 10.04.01
26 Sebbe **AUGUSTIJNS** (Bel) (21) 03.09.99

FORWARDS
7 Cyril **NGONGE** (Bel) (20) 26.05.00
9 Finn **STOKKERS** (24) 18.04.96
11 Ola **JOHN** (28) 19.05.92
17 Morad **EL HADDOUTI** (22) 09.05.98
19 Sylla **SOW** (24) 08.08.96
21 Lennerd **DANEELS** (Bel) (22) 10.04.98
27 David **MIN** (21) 23.06.99
28 Said **BAKARI** (Com) (26) 22.09.94
30 James **EFMORFIDIS** (Gre) (24) 18.01.96
99 Vitalie **DAMASCAN** (Mda) (21) 24.01.99

COACH
Fred **GRIM** (55) 17.08.65

WILLEM II

GOALKEEPERS
1 Robbin **RUITER** (33) 25.03.87
24 Connor **VAN DEN BERG** (19) 18.03.01
26 Jorn **BRONDEEL** (Bel) (27) 07.09.93
31 Maarten **SCHUT** (17) 13.10.03

DEFENDERS
3 Freek **HEERKENS** (31) 13.09.89
4 Jordens **PETERS** (33) 03.05.87
6 Jan-Arie **VAN DER HEIJDEN** (32) 03.03.88
13 Leeroy **OWUSU** (24) 13.08.96
18 Miquel **NELOM** (30) 22.09.90
22 Victor **VAN DEN BOGERT** (21) 12.08.99
25 Sebastian **HOLMEN** (Swe) (28) 29.04.92
27 Derrick **KOHN** (Ger) (21) 04.02.99
46 Jop **VAN DEN AVERT** (20) 11.05.00
48 Vincent **SCHIPPERS** (19) 04.03.01

MIDFIELDERS
8 Pol **LLONCH** (Esp) (28) 07.10.92
16 Rick **ZUIJDERWIJK** (19) 13.04.01
17 Driess **SADDIKI** (Mar) (24) 09.08.96
21 Mike **TRESOR** (Bel) (21) 28.05.99
23 Gorkem **SAGLAM** (Ger) (22) 11.04.98
43 Wesley **SPIERINGHS** (18) 16.01.02

FORWARDS
7 Che **NUNNELY** (21) 04.02.99
9 Paul **GLADON** (28) 18.03.92
10 Vangelis **PAVLIDIS** (Gre) (22) 21.11.98
11 Mats **KOHLERT** (Ger) (22) 02.05.98
14 Elton **KABANGU** (Bel) (22) 08.02.98
15 Ole **ROMENY** (20) 20.06.00
19 John **YEBOAH** (Ger) (20) 23.06.00
20 Kwasi **OKYERE WRIEDT** (Gha) (26) 10.07.94
40 Jasper **DAHLHAUS** (19) 27.11.01

COACH
Adrie **KOSTER** (66) 18.11.54

PEC ZWOLLE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Michael **ZETTERER** (Ger) (25) 12.07.95
16 Xavier **MOUS** (25) 04.08.95
40 Mike **HAUPTMEIJER** (23) 18.03.97

DEFENDERS
2 Bram **VAN POLEN** (35) 11.10.85
4 Yuta **NAKAYAMA** (Jpn) (23) 16.02.97
5 Kenneth **PAAL** (23) 24.06.97
15 Sam **KERSTEN** (22) 30.01.98
17 Destan **BAJSELMANI** (Kvx) (21) 19.03.99
28 Anthony **DEKONO** (20) 07.10.00
31 Sai **VAN WERMESKERKEN** (Jpn) (26) 28.06.94
33 Rav **VAN DEN BERG** (16) 07.07.04
36 Marc-Oliver **DOUE** (20) 11.10.00

MIDFIELDERS
3 Thomas **LAM** (Fin) (27) 18.12.93
6 Mustafa **SAYMAK** (27) 11.02.93
10 Clint **LEEMANS** (25) 15.09.95
11 Jesper **DROST** (27) 11.01.93
13 Rico **STRIEDER** (Ger) (28) 06.07.92
20 Thomas **VAN DEN BELT** (19) 18.06.01
21 Samir **LAGSIR** (17) 20.05.03
22 Pelle **CLEMENT** (24) 19.05.96
25 Immanuel **PHERAI** (19) 25.04.01
30 Dean **HUIBERTS** (20) 16.05.00

FORWARDS
8 Reza **GHOOCHANNEJHAD** (Irn) (33) 20.09.87
9 Mike **VAN DUINEN** (29) 06.11.91
23 Eliano **REIJNDERS** (20) 23.10.00
27 Slobodan **TEDIC** (Srb) (20) 13.04.00
32 Jarno **WESTERMAN** (18) 08.06.02

COACH
John **STEGEMAN** (44) 27.08.76

Prospect...reports suggest that PEC Zwolle defender Rav van den Berg rejected the chance to join his brother Sepp at Liverpool

(ages as of 24.12.20)

Internationals

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

Group A1

Nov 15 - Amsterdam
Netherlands 3 (Wijnaldum 6, 13, Depay 55)
Bosnia & Herzegovina 1 (Prevljak 63)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Soares Dias (Por)
Netherlands: Krul - Dumfries (Hateboer 64), De Vrij, Blind, Wijndal (Van Aanholt 79), Klaassen, Wijnaldum (Van de Beek 64), F. De Jong, Berghuis (Stengs 89), L. De Jong, Depay (Promes 79).
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic - Todorovic, Hadzikadunic, Sanicanin, Kolasinac, Cimirot, Visca (Tatar 78), Pjanic (Zilijkic 89), Krunic (Rahmanovic 78), Gojak (Danilovic 61), Hodzic (Prevljak 61).

Nov 15 - Reggio Emilia
Italy 2 (Jorginho 27 pen, Berardi 83)
Poland 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Italy: Donnarumma - Florenzi (Di Lorenzo 89), Acerbi, Bastoni, Emerson, Barella, Jorginho, Locatelli, Bernardeschi (Berardi 64), Belotti (Okaka 79), Insigne (El Shaarawy 89).
Poland: Szczesny - Bereszynski, Glik, Bednarek, Reca, Krychowiak, Moder (Goralski 45), Szymanski (Zielinski 45), Linetty (Milik 74), Jozwiak (Grosicki 45), Lewandowski. *Sent off: Goralski 77.*

Nov 18 - Sarajevo
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
Italy 2 (Belotti 22, Berardi 68)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Soares Dias (Por)
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Piric - Corluka, Hadzikadunic, Sanicanin, Kadusic (Todorovic 79), Cimirot, Tatar (Rahmanovic 80), Pjanic (Danilovic 77), Gojak, Krunic (Loncar 72), Prevljak (Hadzic 79).
Italy: Donnarumma - Florenzi (Di Lorenzo 45), Acerbi, Bastoni, Emerson, Barella, Jorginho, Locatelli, Berardi (Bernardeschi 82), Belotti (Lasagna 82), Insigne (Calabria 90+4).

Nov 18 - Chorzow
Poland 1 (Joizwiak 6)
Netherlands 2 (Depay 77 pen, Wijnaldum 85)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Grinfeeld (Isr)
Poland: Fabianski - Kedziora, Glik, Bednarek, Reca (Rybus 81), Placheta (Grosicki 75), Klich, Krychowiak (Linetty 70), Zielinski (Moder 71), Jozwiak, Lewandowski (Piatek 46).
Netherlands: Krul - Hateboer (Dumfries 57), De Vrij, Blind (L. De Jong 84), Van Aanholt (Wijndal 70), Klaassen (Van de Beek 70), Wijnaldum, F. De Jong, Stengs (Berghuis 70), Depay, Malen.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy (Q)	6	3	3	0	7	2	12
Netherlands	6	3	2	1	7	4	11
Poland	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
Bosnia-Herz (R)	6	0	2	4	3	11	2

Group A2

Nov 15 - Leuven
Belgium 2 (Tielemans 10, Mertens 24)
England 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)
Belgium: Courtois - Alderweireld, Denayer, Vertonghen, Meunier, Tielemans, Witsel, T. Hazard, De Bruyne, Mertens (Praet 83), Lukaku.
England: Pickford - Walker, Dier, Mings, Trippier (Sancho 70), J. Henderson (Winks 45), Rice, Chilwell (Saka 38), Mount (Calvert-Lewin 69), Grealish, Kane.

Nov 15 - Copenhagen
Denmark 2 (Eriksen 12 pen, 90+2 pen)
Iceland 1 (Kjartansson 85)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Umut Meler (Tur)
Denmark: Schmeichel (Ronnow 45) - Christensen, Kjaer, Vestergaard (Wind 90), Wass, Delaney, Jensen (Jonsson 68), Stryger Larsen, Eriksen, Braithwaite (Andersen 76), Poulsen.
Iceland: Runarsson - Ingason, Eyjolfsson, Magnusson, Saevarsson, G. Sigurdsson, Bjarnason (Palsson 45), A. Sigurdsson (Gunnarsson 70), Skulason, Bodvarsson (Kjartansson 71), A. Gudmundsson (Finnbogason 74).

Nov 18 - Leuven
Belgium 4 (Tielemans 3, Lukaku 57, 69, De Bruyne 87)
Denmark 2 (Wind 17, Chadli 86 og)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)
Belgium: Courtois - Alderweireld, Denayer, Vertonghen (Boyata 90+2), T. Hazard (Foket 77), Tielemans, Dendoncker, Chadli, Mertens, De Bruyne, Lukaku.
Denmark: Schmeichel - Wass, Kjaer, Christensen, Maehle, Hojbjerg, Delaney (Jensen 70), Poulsen (Andersen 76), Eriksen, Braithwaite, Wind (Sisto 88).

Nov 18 - London
England 4 (Rice 20, Mount 24, Foden 80, 84)
Iceland 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Verissimo (Por)
England: Pickford - Walker (Mings 64), Dier, Maguire, Trippier (Maitland-Niles 85), Rice, Mount (Winks 64), Saka, Foden, Grealish (Sancho 76), Kane (Abraham 76).
Iceland: Kristinsson (Halldorsson 45) - Saevarsson, Ingason, Arnason, Hermannsson, Skulason, Palsson, Bjarnason (Johannesson 88), Sigurjonsson (Eyjolfsson 62), A. Gudmundsson (Thorsteinsson 73), Bodvarsson (Sigthorsson 73). *Sent off: Saevarsson 54*

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium (Q)	6	5	0	1	16	6	15
Denmark	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
England	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Iceland (R)	6	0	0	6	3	17	0

Group A3

Nov 14 - Lisbon
Portugal 0
France 1 (Kante 53)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Stieler (Ger)
Portugal: Rui Patricio - Joao Cancelo, Fonte, Ruben Dias, Guerreiro, William Carvalho (Jota 56), Danilo (Oliveira 85), B. Fernandes (Joao Moutinho 72), Bernardo Silva (Trincao 72), Ronaldo, Joao Felix (Paulinho 85).
France: Lloris - Pavard, Varane, Kimpembe, Hernandez, Kante, Pogba, Rabiot, Griezmann, Martial (Giroud 78), Coman (Thuram 59).

Nov 14 - Solna
Sweden 2 (Kulusevski 36, Danielson 45+2)
Croatia 1 (Danielson 81 og)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Siebert (Ger)
Sweden: Olsen - Lustig, Lindelof, Danielson, Bengtsson, Larsson, Olsson, Ekdal, Forsberg, Berg, Kulusevski (Claesson 74).
Croatia: Livakovic - Uremovic (Juranovic 41), Pongracic (Melnjak 77), Caleta-Car, Barisic, Modric, Kovacic (Rog 77), Brekalo (Petkovic 77), Vlasic, Perisic, Budimir (Pasalic 63).

Nov 17 - Split
Croatia 2 (Kovacic 29, 65)
Portugal 3 (Ruben Dias 52, 90, Joao Felix 60)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)
Croatia: Livakovic - Juranovic, Lovren, Skoric, Bradaric, Modric, Rog, Pasalic (Brekalo 64), Kovacic (Basic 90+1), Vlasic (Orsic 84), Perisic. *Sent off: Rog 51.*
Portugal: Rui Patricio - N. Semedo, B. Semedo, Ruben Dias, Mario Rui (Joao Cancelo 71), B. Fernandes (Trincao 45), Danilo (Oliveira 77), Moutinho, Jota (Paulinho), Ronaldo, Joao Felix (Bernardo Silva 71).

Nov 17 - Paris
France 4 (Giroud 16, 59, Pavard 36, Coman 90+4)
Sweden 2 (Claesson 4, Quaison 88)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Blr)
France: Lloris - Pavard, Varane (Zouma 45), Kimpembe, Hernandez (Digne 45), Sissoko, Pogba, Rabiot (Nzonzi 78), Thuram (Mbappe 58), Griezmann, Giroud (Coman 84).
Sweden: Olsen - Lustig (Krafth 66), Lindelof (Helander 66), Danielson, Bengtsson, Claesson (Quaison 66), Olsson, Larsson (Cajuste 87), Forsberg, Berg (Isak 86), Kulusevski.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France (Q)	6	5	1	0	12	5	16
Portugal	6	4	1	1	12	4	13
Croatia	6	1	0	5	9	16	3
Sweden (R)	6	1	0	5	5	13	3

Group A4

Nov 14 - Leipzig
Germany 3 (Sane 23, Werner 33, 64)
Ukraine 1 (Yaremchuk 12)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)
Germany: Neuer - Ginter, Sule, Rudiger, Max, Goretzka, Koch, Gundogan, Sane (Waldschmidt 86), Gnabry, Werner (Brandt 76).
Ukraine: Pyatov - Konoplya, Zabarnyi, Matviyenko, Sobol, Malinovskiy, Stepanenko (Makarenko 69), Zinchenko (Kharatin 86), Marlos, Yaremchuk (Junior Moraes 75), Zubkov (Mykhaylichenko 74).

Nov 14 - Basle
Switzerland 1 (Freuler 26)
Spain 1 (Moreno 89)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Switzerland: Sommer - Elvedi, Akanji, Rodriguez, Fernandes, Freuler, Xhaka, Zuber (Steffen 72), Shaqiri (Sow 72), Embolo (Mehmedi 90), Seferovic (Omeragic 84). *Sent off: Elvedi 79.*
Spain: Simon - Sergi Roberto, Ramos, P. Torres, Reguilon, Merino (Moreno 80), Busquets (Koke 72), F. Torres, Fabian (Morata 56), Oyarzabal (Traore 73), Dani Olmo (Canales 73).

Nov 17 - Seville
Spain 6 (Morata 17, F. Torres 33, 55, 71, Rodri 38, Oyarzabal 89)
Germany 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Ekberg (Swe)
Spain: Simon - Sergi Roberto, Ramos (Garcia 43), P. Torres, Gaya, Rodri, F. Torres (Asensio 73), Koke, Canales (Ruiz 12), Dani Olmo (Moreno 73), Morata (Oyarzabal 73).
Germany: Neuer - Ginter, Sule (Tah 45), Koch, Max, Goretzka (Neuhaus 61), Gundogan, Kroos, Sane (Waldschmidt 61), Gnabry, Werner (Henrichs 76).

Nov 17 - Lucerne
Switzerland* P
Ukraine P
**Switzerland were awarded a 3–0 win after the match was cancelled due to Ukraine being placed in quarantine following positive COVID-19 tests*

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain (Q)	6	3	2	1	13	3	11
Germany	6	2	3	1	10	13	9
Switzerland	6	1	3	2	9	8	6
Ukraine (R)	6	2	0	4	5	13	6

Group B1

Nov 15 - Vienna
Austria 2 (Schaub 81, Grbic 87)
Northern Ireland 1 (Magennis 74)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mariani (Ita)
Austria: Pervan - Lainer, Dragovic (Ranftl 45), Hinteregger, Ulmer (Grbic 78), Baumgartlinger (Schaub 78), Ilsanker, Schlager, Sabitzer, Alaba, Gregoritsch (Arnautovic 63).
Northern Ireland: McGovern - Ballard (Cathcart 83), McLaughlin, Flanagan, Dallas, McNair, Smith, McCann (Davis 83), Ferguson (Lewis 36), Washington (Magennis 62), Boyce (Whyte 62).

Nov 15 - Ploiesti
Romania* P
Norway P
**Romania were awarded a 3–0 win after the match was cancelled due to Norway being placed in quarantine following positive COVID-19 tests*

Nov 18 - Vienna
Austria 1 (Grbic 90+4)
Norway 1 (Zahid 61)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)
Austria: Pervan - Lainer, Ilsanker (Trauner 81), Hinteregger, Ulmer, Ranftl, Baumgartlinger, Schlager (Grbic 65), Alaba, Sabitzer, Arnautovic.
Norway: Bratveit - Ryerson (Granli 81), Hanche-Olsen, Gabrielsen, Skjelvik, Zahid (Askildsen 81), Tronstad, Ulvestad, Moller Daehli (Thorstvedt 67), Strand Larsen (Evjen 86), Berisha (Aalen Vindheim 86).

Nov 18 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 1 (Boyce 56)
Romania 1 (Bicfalvi 81)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Scharer (Sui)
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell - Ballard, J. Evans, Cathcart, Dallas, McNair, Smith (Galbraith 79), McCann, Kennedy (Lewis 66), Magennis (McLaughlin 79), Boyce (Washington 67).
Romania: Tatarusanu - Nedelcearu, Cristea, Tosca (Bicfalvi 74), Cretu (Mogos 64), Nistor, Marin, Malino Paulino, Man (Maxim 64), Alibec (Baluta 87), Tanase (Ganea 87).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria (P)	6	4	1	1	9	6	13
Norway	6	3	1	2	12	7	10
Romania	6	2	2	2	8	9	8
N. Ireland (R)	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

Group B2

Nov 15 - Trnava
Slovakia 1 (Gregus 13)
Scotland 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)
Slovakia: Rodak - Pekarik, Satka, Skriniar, Mazan, Hrosovsky, Kucka (Lobotka 61), Duda, Hamsik (Rusnak 68), Gregus, Duris (Safranko 90+4).
Scotland: Gordon - Considine (Griffiths 68), McKenna, Cooper, Palmer, McGinn, McLean, Tierney, Armstrong (Shankland 87), Christie, McBurnie.

Nov 15 - Plzen
Czech Republic 1 (Darida 7)
Israel 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jovanovic (Srb)
Czech Republic: Vaclik - Coufal, Kalas, Brabec, Mateju, Soucek, Kral, Masopust (Kopic 62), Darida (Dockal 89), Jankto (Vydra 82), Ondrasek (Krmencik 62).
Israel: Marciano - Bitton, Tibi, Elhamed, Natcho (Lavi 45), Dasa, Peretz (Weissman 73), Golasa (Abu Fani 86), Tawatha (Menachem 45), Zahavi, Solomon. *Sent off: Elhamed 80.*

Nov 18 - Plzen
Czech Republic 2 (Soucek 17, Ondrasek 55)
Slovakia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Czech Republic: Vaclik (Koubek 45) - Coufal, Kalas, Brabec, Mateju, Soucek, Kral, Masopust (Cerny 45), Darida (Barak 88), Jankto (Kopic 74), Ondrasek (Vydra 66).
Slovakia: Rodak - Pekarik, Gyomber, Skriniar, Hubocan, Lobotka (Hrosovsky 62), Rusnak (Suslov 62), Kucka (Gregus 67), Hamsik, Mak (Safranko 62), Duris (Schranz 81).

Nov 18 - Netanya
Israel 1 (Solomon 44)
Scotland 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Raczkowski (Pol)
Israel: Marciano - Dasa, Bitton, Tibi, Yeini (Dgani 78), Menachem, Natcho (Golasa 62), Lavi (Abu Fani 78), Solomon (Cohen 84), Weissman, Zahavi.
Scotland: Marshall - O'Donnell (Burke 73), McTominay, Gallagher (McKenna 73), Tierney, Robertson, McGinn (Griffiths 61), Jack, McGregor (McLean 82), Dykes (McBurnie 61), Christie.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Czech Rep (P)	6	4	0	2	9	5	12
Scotland	6	3	1	2	5	4	10
Israel	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Slovakia (R)	6	1	1	4	5	10	4

Group B3

Nov 15 - Istanbul
Turkey 3 (Karaman 26, Under 32, Tosun 52 pen)
Russia 2 (Cheryshev 10, Kuzyaev 57)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Turkey: Gunok - Celik (Kabak 64), Ayhan, Demiral, Erkin, Yokuslu, Under (Turuc 64), Tufan (Tekdemir 86), Calhanoglu (Yazici 86), Karaman, Tosun (Kahveci 80).
Russia: Marinato - Semenov, Dzhikiya, Kudryashov, Kuzyaev (An. Miranchuk 70), Zobnin (Fomin 79), Ozdoev, Zhirkov, Al. Miranchuk (Ionov 79), Cheryshev (Karavaev 37), Zabolotny (Erokhin 70). *Sent off: Semenov 24.*

Nov 15 - Budapest
Hungary 1 (Kalmar 39)
Serbia 1 (Radonijc 17)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Nyberg (Swe)
Hungary: Dibusz - Kecskes, Lang, Botka, Bese (Gyurcso 78), Nagy, Siger (Nego 57), Holender (Hangya 68), Kalmar, Szoboszlai (Schafer 78), Nikolics (Konyves 57).
Serbia: Dmitrovic - Milenkovic, Gudelj, Spajic, Lazovic (Gacinovic 57), Maksimovic (Grujic 62), Lukic, Ristic (Mladenovic 62), Tadic (Milinkovic-Savic 79), Jovic, Radonjic (Vlahovic 79).

Nov 18 - Budapest
Hungary 2 (Siger 57, Varga 90+4)
Turkey 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kruzliak (Svk)
Hungary: Dibusz - Fiola, Lang, Szalai, Nego (Botka 89), Siger, Nagy, Hangya (Holender 74), Kalmar (Cseri 45), Nikolics (Gyurcso 64), Konyves (Varga 45).
Turkey: Gunok - Sangare, Kabak, Demiral, Erkin, Tekdemir (Ayhan 88), Tufan (Ozcan 71), Kahveci (Yazici 55), Calhanoglu, Tosun (Turuc 71), Karaman.

Nov 18 - Belgrade
Serbia 5 (Radonjic 10, Jovic 25, 45+1, Vlahovic 40, Mladenovic 64)
Russia 0
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Serbia: Rajkovic - Milenkovic, Spajic, S. Mitrovic (Pavlovic 90), Radonjic (Vlahovic 31), Gudelj (Zdjelar 90), Maksimovic (Gacinovic 45), Ristic, Mladenovic (Randjelovic 90), Jovic, A. Mitrovic.
Russia: Marinato (Dzhanaev 45) - Karavaev, Diveev (Evgeniev 45), Dzhikiya, Zhirkov, Ozdoev, Kuzyaev, Erokhin, Al. Miranchuk (Mostovoy 45), An. Miranchuk (Oblyakov 45), Zabolotny (Cheryshev 72).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hungary (P)	6	3	2	1	7	4	11
Russia	6	2	2	2	9	12	8
Serbia	6	1	3	2	9	7	6
Turkey (R)	6	1	3	2	6	8	6

Group B4

Nov 15 - Sofia
Bulgaria 1 (Iliev 68 pen)
Finland 2 (Pukki 7, Lod 45+1)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Rumsas (Ltu)
Bulgaria: Lukov - Popov, Dimitrov, Bozhikov, Velkovski, Malinov, Karabelyov (Tsvetkov 85), Delev (Kovachev 78), Yankov (Iliev 65), Ivanov (Karagaren 78), Kraev.
Finland: Hradecky - Alho, Toivio, Arajuuri, Uronen, Lod, Sparv (Schuller 69), Kamara, Taylor (Soiri 68), Pukki (Niskanen 89), Pohjanpalo (Forss 35).

Nov 15 - Cardiff
Wales 1 (Brooks 66)
Republic of Ireland 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ardeleanu (Cze)
Wales: Ward - Mepham, Rodon, Davies, N. Williams, Ampadu, Morrell, Norrington-Davies (Moore 62), Bale, Brooks (Roberts 88), James.
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - Doherty, Duffy, Long, O'Shea (O'Dowda 82), Molumby (Hourihane 76), Brady (Byrne 82), Hendrick, Horgan (Knight 59), Idah (Collins 75), McClean.
Sent off: Hendrick 90+4.

Nov 18 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 0
Bulgaria 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Visser (Bel)
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - O'Shea, Duffy, Long, Manning (Christie 86), Knight, Brady (Byrne 78), Hourihane, Curtis (Parrott 85), Collins (Maguire 86), Horgan (Cullen 67).
Bulgaria: Lukov - Popov, Dimitrov, Angelov, Gusmao (Vasilev 61), Malinov, Tsvetkov, Delev (Kovachev 61), Iliev (Aleksandrov 81), Ivanov (Karagaren 61), Kraev.

Nov 18 - Cardiff
Wales 3 (H. Wilson 29, James 46, Moore 84)
Finland 1 (Pukki 63)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:**
Wales: Ward - Mepham, Rodon, Lawrence (Moore 45), Roberts, Ampadu, Morrell, Norrington-Davies (Gunter 90+3), James (Brooks 89), H. Wilson (Roberts 89), Bale (Lawrence 61).
Finland: Hradecky - Toivio, O'Shaughnessy (Hamalainen 61), Arajuuri, Alho, Schuller (Valakari 73), Taylor (Soiri 62), Kamara, Uronen, Pukki (Forss 89), Lod.
Sent off: Uronen 12.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wales (P)	6	5	1	0	7	1	16
Finland	6	4	0	2	7	5	12
Rep of Ireland	6	0	3	3	1	4	3
Bulgaria (R)	6	0	2	4	2	7	2

Group C1

Nov 14 - Zapresic
Azerbaijan 0
Montenegro 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ivanov (Rus)
Azerbaijan: Mahammadaliyev - Badalov (Isgandarli 67), Medvedev, B. Huseynov, A. Huseynov (Seydiyev 43), Qarayev, Mustafayev (Jamalov 45), Sadikhov (Seydaev 45), Salahli, Mutallimov (Nacafov 81), Emreli Anar.
Montenegro: Mijatovic - Marusic, Sofranac, Vujacic, Radunovic, Ivanovic, Scekic (Savicevic 81), Bakic, Haksabanovic, Jovetic (Islamovic 90+3), Mugosa (Boljevic 58). *Sent off: Ivanovic 45+1.*

Nov 14 - Nicosia
Cyprus 2 (Kastanos 34 pen, 70)
Luxembourg 1 (Kousoulos 5 og)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Gestranius (Fin)
Cyprus: Demetriou - Antoniou (Kyriakou 83), Shelis, Laifis, N. Ioannou, Kousoulos (Kyriakou 62), Artymatas, Pittas, Kastanos (Papafotis 83), Tzionis (T. Ioannou 62), Ilia.
Luxembourg: Moris - Jans, Selimovic, Gerson, Carlson, Barreiro Martins, Pinto, Thill (Deville 70), Sinani, Rodrigues, Muratovic (Skenderovic 55).
Sent off: Selimovic 33.

Nov 17 - Luxembourg City
Luxembourg 0
Azerbaijan 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
Luxembourg: Schon - Jans, Mahmutovic, Gerson, Pinto, V. Thill (S. Thill 80), Martins, Skenderovic (Bohnert 90), Sinani, Muratovic (Santos Da Graca 90+2), Deville (Bensi 67).
Azerbaijan: Mahammadaliyev - Seydiyev, Heseynov (Aliyev 44), Badalov, Krivotsyuk, Mutallimov (Mustafayev 69), Qarayev, Ibrahimli (Nacafov 84), Salahli, Anar (Sadikhov 84), Seydaev.

Nov 17 - Podgorica
Montenegro 4 (Jovetic 14, Boljevic 25, 28, Mugosa 60)
Cyprus 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Shemeulevitch (Isr)
Montenegro: Mijatovic - Vukcevic, Vujacic, Simic, Marusic, Boljevic (Jovovic 72), Scekic (Radunovic 72), Bakic (Kosovic 61), Haksabanovic, Mugosa (Islamovic 71), Jovetic (Savicevic 61).
Cyprus: Demetriou - Kyriakou, Shelis, Laifis, N. Ioannou (Loizou 66), Kousoulos (Gogic 65), Artymatas (Kyriakou 45), T. Ioannou, Pittas, Kakoullis (Tzionis 65), Kastanos (Makris 85).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montenegro (P)	6	4	1	1	10	2	13
Luxembourg	6	3	1	2	7	5	10
Azerbaijan	6	1	3	2	2	4	6
Cyprus*	6	1	1	4	2	10	4

**Cyprus will play Estonia in March 2021 in the relegation play-outs*

Group C2

Nov 15 - Skopje
North Macedonia 2 (Trichkovski 29, Stojanovski 68)
Estonia 1 (Sappinen 52)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Avram (Rou)
North Macedonia: Siskovski - Bejtulai, Velkovski, Musliu, Ristovski, Spirovski (Kostadinov 59), Nikolov, Trajkovski (Stojanovski 59), Elmas (Zajkov 85), Trichkovski, Nestorovski (Doriev 78).
Estonia: Hein - Teniste, Tamm, Mets, Pikk, Kreida, Ainsalu (Tunjov 79), Zenjov (Liivak 63), Vassiljev (Sorga 55), Sinyavskiy (Miller 79), Sappinen (Anier 63).

Nov 15 - Tbilisi
Georgia 1 (Qazaishvili 65 pen)
Armenia 2 (Ghazaryan 33, Adamyan 86)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Guida (Ita)
Georgia: Makaridze - Jigauri, Khocholava, Grigalava, Navalovski, Kankava, Aburjania (Kvekveskiri 80), Lobzhanidze (Papunashvili 80), Gvilia (Mikeltadze 80), Davitashvili (Qazaishvili 56), Lobjanidze (Kacharava 67).
Armenia: Yurchenko - Hambardzumyan, Haroyan, Calisir, Hovhannisyan (Grigoryan 69), Barseghyan, Udo (Muradyan 77), Grigoryan, Ghazaryan (Bichakhchyan 77), Adamyan (Voskanyan 89), Karapetian (Koryan 77).

Nov 18 - Nicosia
Armenia 1 (Hambardzumyan 55)
North Macedonia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Madden (Sco)
Armenia: Yurchenko - Hambardzumyan, Haroyan, Voskanyan, Hovhannisyan, A. Grigoryan, Koryan (S. Grigoryan 65), Udo (Angulo 46), Hakobyan (Muradyan 70), Karapetyan (Bichakhchyan 46), Barseghyan (Ishkhanyan 90+1).
North Macedonia: Shishkovski – Ristovski (Doriev 70), Musliu (Kitanovski 70), Zajkov, Velkovski, Bejtulai, Trichkovski, Kostadinov (Micevski 62), Totre (Trajchevski 84), Trajkovski, Stojanovski (Nestorovski 62).

Nov 18 - Tbilisi
Georgia 0
Estonia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Peljto (Bih)
Georgia: Loria - Kashia, Khocholava (Grigalava 46), Kakabadze, Tabidze, Kankava, Kvekveskiri, Lobzhanidze (Mikeltadze 85), Davitashvili (Papunashvili 66), Qazaishvili, Kacharava (Lobjanidze 78).
Estonia: Hein – Teniste (Lilander 81), Tamm, Pikk, Kuusk, Vassiljev, Soomets (Miller 79), Kreida, Zenjov (Marin 79), Sappinen (Anier 86), Sinyavskiy (Livak 86).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Armenia (P)	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
North Macedonia	6	2	3	1	9	8	9
Georgia	6	1	4	1	6	6	7
Estonia*	6	0	3	3	5	9	3

**Estonia will play Cyprus in March 2021 in the relegation play-outs*

Group C3

Nov 15 - Chisinau
Moldova 0
Greece 2 (Fortounis 32, Bakasetas 41)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Jovic (Yug)
Moldova: Namasco - Jardan, Posmac, Armas, Reabciuk, Cebotaru (Epureanu 45), Ionita (Boiciuc 83), Rata (Turcan 62), Cociuc (Caimacov 45), Spataru, Damascan (Dros 71).
Greece: Vlachodimos - Mavrias, Chatzidiakos, Tzavellas, Tsimikas (Kyriakopoulos 62), Rodrigues, Bouchalakis, Limnios (Chatzigiovanis 78), Bakasetas, Fortounis (Tzolis 65), Pavlidis (Giakoumakis 78).

Nov 15 - Ljubljana
Slovenia 2 (Kurtic 62, Ilicic 90+4 pen)
Kosovo 1 (Muriqi 58)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Frankowski (Pol)
Slovenia: Belec - Stojanovic, Blazic, Mevlja, Balkovec, Vetrih, Kurtic, Ilicic (Kouter 90+6), Lovric (Crnigoj 87), Bohar, Vuckic (Sporar 68).
Kosovo: Muric - Vojvoda, Rrahmani, Aliti, Hadergjonaj, Rashkaj, Kryeziu (Kastrati 71), Zhegrova (Hasani 90+1), V. Berisha, B. Berisha (Rashani 84), Muriqi.

Nov 18 - Athens
Greece 0
Slovenia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Del Cerro Grande (Esp)
Greece: Vlachodimos - Mavrias, Chatzidiakos, Tzavellas (Masouras 79), Tsimikas (Kyriakopoulos 90+1), Kourbelis, Rodrigues (Tzolis 67), Limnios, Bakasetas, Fortounis, Giakoumakis (Pavlidis 45).
Sent off: Chatzidiakos 90.
Slovenia: Oblak - Stojanovic, Blazic, Mevlja, Balkovec, Kurtic, Bijol (Vetrih 77), Ilicic (Bajric 90+2), Lovric (Skubic 90+2), Bohar (Verbic 67), Vuckic (Sporar 77).

Nov 18 - Pristina
Kosovo 1 (Kastrati 31)
Moldova 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tarajev (Est)
Kosovo: Ujkani - Vojvoda, Rrahmani (Aliti 20), Dresevic, Hadergjonaj, Shala, V. Berisha, Zhegrova (Kryeziu 84), Celina (Thaci 89), Kastrati, Muriqi.
Moldova: Namasco - Jardan, Efros, Armas, Platica (Rata 38), Ionita (Caimacov 60), Cebotaru, Spataru (Belousov 85), Turcan, Reabciuk, Nicolaescu.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovenia (P)	6	4	2	0	8	1	14
Greece	6	3	3	0	6	1	12
Kosovo	6	1	2	3	4	6	5
Moldova*	6	0	1	5	1	11	1

**Moldova will play Kazakhstan in March 2021 in the relegation play-outs*

Group C4

Nov 15 - Tirana
Albania 3 (Cikalleshi 16, Ismajli 23, Manaj 62 pen)
Kazakhstan 1 (Abiken 24)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Estrada Fernandez (Esp)
Albania: Berisha - Ismajli, Djimsiti, Veseli, Hysaj, Abrashi, Kallaku (Gjasula 53), Uzuni (Doka 68), Memushaj (Selahi 86), Cikalleshi (Sulejmanov 86), Manaj (Balaj 86).
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov - Kerimzhanov (Fedin 45), Marochkin, Alip, Kuat (Darabaev 87), Vorogovskiy, Beysebekov, Abiken (Tagybergen 45), Suyumbayev (Bystrov 70), Shchetkin, Aimbetov (Khizhnichenko 71).

Nov 15 - Minsk
Belarus 2 (Yablonskiy 5, Ebong 20)
Lithuania 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kavanagh (Eng)
Belarus: Khatkevich - Yuzepchuk, Polyakov, Sachivko, Bordachev, Enong, Kendysh (Maevski 58), Yablonskiy, Stasevich (Antilevski 82), Lisakovich (Bakhar 72), Skavysh (Klimovich 81).
Lithuania: Svedkauskas - Vaitkunas, Gaspuitis, Girdvainis, Beneta, Utkus (Romanovskij 76), Slivka, Novikovas (Petravicius 82), Eliosius (Sirgedas 55), Lasickas (Laukzemis 45), Kazlauskas (Veliulis 55).

Nov 18 - Tirana
Albania 3 (Cikalleshi 19, 27 pen, Manaj 44)
Belarus 2 (Skavysh 35, Ebong 80)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Petrescu (Rou)
Albania: Berisha - Veseli, Djimsiti, Memolla, Ismajli, Doka, Memushaj (Selahi 64), Gjasula, Laci (Ramadani 90+2), Cikalleshi (Balaj 64), Manaj (Uzuni 71).
Belarus: Khatkevich - Polyakov, Bordachev (Pechenin 46), Sachivko, Stasevich, Maevskiy (Antilevskiy 77), Yablonskiy (Kendysh 63), Yuzepchuk, Ebong, Skavysh (Klimovich 86), Lisakovich (Laptev 77).

Nov 18 - Almaty
Kazakhstan 1 (Aymbetov 38)
Lithuania 2 (Vorobjovas 40, Novikovas 90+4)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Gocek (Tur)
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov - Logvinenko, Dosmagambetov (Miroshnichenko 69), Marochkin, Alip (Khizhnichenko 87), Kuat, Tagybergen, Vorogovskiy, Abiken, Shchetkin, Aymbetov (Zhangylyshbay 69).
Lithuania: Svedkauskas - Mikoliunas, Vaitkunas (Gaspuitis 46), Girdvainis, Beneta, Novikovas, Slivka (Kazlauskas 76), Simkus, Vorobjovas, Sirgedas (Eliosius 67), Laukzemis (Petravicius 84).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Albania (P)	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Belarus	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
Lithuania	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
Kazakhstan*	6	1	1	4	5	9	4

**Kazakhstan will play Moldova in March 2021 in the relegation play-outs*

Group D1

Nov 14 - Ta' Qali
Malta 3 (Garcia 55 og, Degabriele 58, Dimech 90+3)
Andorra 1 (Rebes 3)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Kralovic (Svk)
Malta: Bonello - Micallef, Agius, Shaw, Mbong, Teuma, Guillaumier (Pisani 84), Camenzuli, Gambin (Dimech 89), Degabriele (Grech 89), Montebello (Satariano 76).
Andorra: Gomes - San Nicolas (A. Martinez 69), C. Garcia, Alavedra, Cervos, C. Martinez (Bernat 77), Vieira, Rebes (Blanco 77), Martinez Palau, Cucu (Sanchez 69), Alaez.

Nov 14 - Riga
Latvia 1 (Kamess 59)
Faroe Islands 1 (Vatnhamar 60)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Dabanovic (Mne)
Latvia: Ozols - Savalnieks, Cernomordijs, Dubra, Jurkovskis, Karklins, Rugins (Saveljevs 61), Kamess (Ontuzans 61), Ikaunieks (Jaunzems 90+1), Ciganiks (Kigurs 71), Gutkovskis.
Faroe Islands: Gestsson - Rolantsson, Faero, Nattestad, Davidsen, Bjartalid, S. Vatnhamar, Baldvinsson (Jonsson 68), G. Vatnhamar, K. Olsen, M. Olsen (Jakobsen 83).

Nov 17 - Andorra la Vella
Andorra 0
Latvia 5 (Cernomordijs 6, Ikaunieks 57, 60, Gutkovskis 70 pen, Krollis 90 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Meckarovski (Mkd)
Andorra: Gomes - Rubio (A. Martinez 66), C. Garcia, E. Garcia, San Nicolas, C. Martinez (Clemente 84), Pujol Pons (Moreno 85), Rebes, Cervos, Cucu (Sanchez 78), Vieira (Alaez 66).
Sent off: C. Garcia 89.
Latvia: Ozols - Savalnieks, Cernomordijs, Dubra, Jurkovskis, Kamess (Ontuzans 74), Zjuzins (Saveljevs 54), Karklins, Ciganiks (D. Ikaunieks 82), J. Ikaunieks (Kigurs 75), Gutkovskis (Krollis 75).

Nov 17 - Ta' Qali
Malta 1 (Guillaumier 54)
Faroe Islands 1 (Jonsson 69)
HT: 0-0. Ref: Tohver (Est)
Malta: Bonello - Shaw, Agius (Dimech 84), Borg, Mbong, Guillaumier, Teuma (Pisani 79), Camenzuli, Gambin, Degabriele (Satariano 84), Montebello (Nwoko 75).
Faroe Islands: Gestsson - Rolantsson, Faero, G. Vatnhamar, Davidsen, Bjartalid (Jonsson 61), S. Vatnhamar, Hansson (Wardum 88), B. Olsen, K. Olsen (Jakobsen 81), M. Olsen (Hansen 88).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP D1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Faroe Islands (P)	6	3	3	0	9	5	12
Malta	6	2	3	1	8	6	9
Latvia	6	1	4	1	8	4	7
Andorra	6	0	2	4	1	11	2

Group D2

Nov 14 - Serravalle
San Marino 0
Gibraltar 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Monzul (Ukr)
San Marino: Benedettini - Brolli, Simoncini, Rossi, Palazzi, Tomassini (Battistini 57), Lunadei, Hirsch (Mularoni 57), Golinucci, Berardi (Vitaioli 67), Nanni.
Gibraltar: Coleing - Chipolina, Wiseman, Mouelhi (Styche 66), Sergeant, Torilla (Priestley 77), Annesley, Olivero, Walker, De Barr, L. Casciaro (K. Casciaro 54).

Nov 17 - Gibraltar
Gibraltar 1 (Frommelt 17 og)
Liechtenstein 1 (Frick 44)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Farrugia Cann (Mlt)
Gibraltar: Coleing - Sergeant, Chipolina, Wiseman, Mouelhi, Olivero, Walker, Ronan (Barnett 88), Annesley, Badr Hassan (Jolley 71), De Barr (Styche 90+1).
Liechtenstein: Hobi - Brandle (Yildiz 56), Malin, Hofer, Goppel, Buchel (Kardesoglu 71), Y. Frick, Frommelt, Hasler, Kuhne (Wolfinger 71), N. Frick (Ospelt 79).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP D2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gibraltar (P)	4	2	2	0	3	1	8
Liechtenstein	4	1	2	1	3	2	5
San Marino	4	0	2	2	0	3	2

EURO 2020 PLAY-OFF FINALS

Path A

Nov 12 - Budapest
Hungary 2 (Nego 88, Szoboszlai 90+2)
Iceland 1 (G. Sigurdsson 11)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Kuipers (Ned)
Hungary: Gulacsi - Botka, Orban, At. Szalai, Fiola (Lovrencsics 61), Kalmar (Siger 61), Nagy (Nego 84), Szoboszlai, Holender (Nikolics 71), Sallai, Ad. Szalai (Konyves 84).
Iceland: Halldorsson - Palsson, Arnason, R. Sigurdsson, Magnusson, J. Gudmundsson (Bodvarsson 73), Sigurjonsson (Ingason 87), Gunnarsson (AF Skulason 83), G. Sigurdsson, Bjarnason, Finnbogason (A. Gudmundsson 73).

Path B

Nov 12 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 1 (Skriniar 87 og)
Slovakia 2 (Kucka 17, Duris 110)
After extra-time
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell - Dallas, Cathcart (Flanagan 99), J. Evans, Lewis, McGinn (Lafferty 77), McNair (Ferguson 104), Davis, Saville (Thompson 66), Washington (Whyte 66), Magennis (Boyce 77).
Slovakia: Rodak - Pekarik, Satka, Skriniar, Hubocan, Lobotka (Hrosovsky 65), Rusnak (Gyomber 118), Kucka, Hamsik (Gregus 105), Mak (Duris 65), Duda (Mraz 85).

Path C

Nov 12 - Belgrade
Serbia 1 (Jovic 90)
Scotland 1* (Christie 52)
**Scotland win 5-4 on penalties after extra-time*
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Esp)
Serbia: Rajkovic - Milenkovic, S. Mitrovic (Spajic 108), Gudelj, Lazovic, Maksimovic (Jovic 70), Lukic, Kostic (Mladenovic 59), Tadic, Milinkovic-Savic (Katai 70), A. Mitrovic.
Scotland: Marshall - McTominay, Gallagher, Tierney, O'Donnell (Griffiths 117), Jack, McGregor, Robertson, McGinn (McLean 83), Dykes (McBurnie 83), Christie (Paterson 87).

Path D

Nov 12 - Tbilisi
Georgia 0
North Macedonia 1 (Pandev 56)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Georgia: Loria - Kakabadze, Kvirkvelia, Kashia (Jigauri 88), Dvali (Davitashvili 90+2), Kankava, Kvekveskiri, Okriashvili, Gvilia (Papunashvili 80), Qazaishvili (Khocholava 90+2), Kacharava (Lobjanidze 81).
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski - Bejtulai, Velkovski, Musliu, Ristovski (Zajkov 89), Nikolov (Kostadinov 84), Ademi (Spirovski 67), Alioski, Elmas, Nestorovski (Trichkovski 89), Pandev.

WORLD CUP 2022 QUALIFIERS

SOUTH AMERICA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

Matchday 3

Nov 12 - La Paz
Bolivia 2 (Arce 37, Martins 60)
Ecuador 3 (Caicedo 46, Mena 55, Gruezo 88 pen)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pereira Sampaio (Bra)
Bolivia: Lampe - Ribera, Valverde (Montero 54), Jusino, Flores (Sagredo 90+2), Fernandez (Vaca 66), Justiniano, Saavedra (Villarroel 67), Arce, Abrego (Alvarez 67), Martins.
Ecuador: Dominguez - Preciado, Arboleda, Arreaga, B. Caicedo (Plata 72), M. Caicedo (Franco 83), Gruezo, Mena (Julio 83), Estupinan, Sornoza (Ibarra 63), Estrada.

Nov 13 - Buenos Aires
Argentina 1 (Gonzalez 41)
Paraguay 1 (Romero 21 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Claus (Bra)
Argentina: Armani - Otamendi, Martinez Quarta, Montiel, De Paul (Alario 83), Paredes, Palacios (Lo Celso 29), Gonzalez, Ocampos (Di Maria 60), Messi, L. Martinez (Dominguez 83).
Paraguay: Silva - Rojas, Balbuena, Gomez, Alonso, Gimenez (Rojas 86), Cardozo Lucena, Villasanti (Morel 74), Almiron (Alderete 90+2), Lezcano (Perez 74), Romero (Sanabria 86).

Nov 13 – Barranquilla
Colombia 0
Uruguay 3 (Cavani 5, Suarez 54 pen, Nunez 73)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Rapallini (Arg)
Colombia: Ospina - Cuadrado, Murillo, Mina, Mojica, Uribe (Cardona 65), Barrios (Diaz 32), Lema, James, Zapata, Muriel (Morelos 60).
Sent off: Mina 90.
Uruguay: Campana - Caceres, Godin, Gimenez, Vina, Nandez, Torreira, Bentancur (Neves 90+3), De La Cruz (Nunez 46), Suarez (Rodriguez 70), Cavani (Arambarri 78).

Nov 13 – Santiago
Chile 2 (Vidal 20, 35)
Peru 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)
Chile: Bravo – Isla (Castro 84), Maripan, Diaz, Beausejour, Pulgar (Baeza 71), Vidal, Orellana (Andia 76), Pinares (Echeverria 70), Meneses, Mora (Sanchez 84).
Peru: Gallese - Advincula, Araujo, Abram, Trauco (Gonzales 76), Yotun, Tapia (Polo 77), Carrillo, Aquino (Cueva 39), Flores (Lopez 60), Ruidiaz (Lapadula 60).

Nov 14 - Sao Paulo
Brazil 1 (Firmino 67)
Venezuela 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)
Brazil: Ederson - Danilo, Thiago Silva, Marquinhos, Lodi (Telles 90+6), Everton Ribeiro, Allan, Douglas Luiz (Paqueta 46), Gabriel Jesus (Everton 76), Firmino, Richarlison (Pedro 76).
Venezuela: Farinez - Rosales (Gonzalez 65), Angel, Osorio, Feltscher (Del Pino 18), Rincon, Moreno, Casseres, Soteldo (Otero 65), Rondon, Machis (Savarino 79).

Matchday 4

Nov 17 - Quito
Ecuador 6 (Arboleda 7, Mena 9, Estrada 32, Arreaga 39, Plata 78, Estupinan 90+1)
Colombia 1 (James 45+1 pen)
HT: 4-1. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)
Ecuador: Dominguez - Perlaza (Preciado 87), Arboleda, Arreaga, Estupinan, M. Caicedo, Mendez, Ibarra (B. Caicedo 81), Munoz (Plata 32), Mena (Rojas 87), Estrada.
Colombia: Vargas - Orejuela (Muriel 41), Sanchez, Murillo, Mojica (Fabra 40), Cuadrado, Uribe, Lerma (Cardona 53), James, Zapata, Diaz (Suarez 41).

Nov 17 - Caracas
Venezuela 2 (Del Pino 9, Rondon 81)
Chile 1 (Vidal 15)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)
Venezuela: Farinez - Gonzalez, Angel, Osorio, Del Pino (Conde 90+1), Moreno, Herrera, Casseres (Otero 78), Savarino (Soteldo 70), Rondon, Machis (Chancellor 90+1).
Chile: Bravo - Isla, Maripan, Diaz, Beausejour, Vidal, Pulgar (Vilches 89), Pinares (Baeza 46), Sanchez, Meneses, Mora (Palacios 76).

Nov 17 - Asuncion
Paraguay 2 (A. Romero 19 pen, Kaku 72)
Bolivia 2 (Martins 41, Cespedes 45)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Herrera (Ven)
Paraguay: Silva - Espinola (Perez 62), Balbuena, Gomez, Alonso (Rojas 62), Sanchez, Cardozo Lucena (Kaku 58), Gimenez (Villasanti 83), O. Romero, A. Romero, Sanabria.
Bolivia: Lampe - Ribera, Jusino, Montero, Sagredo, Arce (Flores 80), Justiniano (Wayar 90+4), Saavedra (Sanchez 90+4), Cespedes (Abrego 81), Martins, Alvarez (Chumacero 70).

Nov 17 - Montevideo
Uruguay 0
Brazil 2 (Arthur 34, Richarlison 45)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)
Uruguay: Campana - Caceres, Godin, Gimenez, Oliveros, Nandez, Torreira (Arambarri 60), Bentancur (B. Rodriguez 60), De La Cruz (J. Rodriguez 70), Cavani, Nunez.
Sent off: Cavani 71.
Brazil: Ederson - Danilo, Thiago Silva, Marquinhos, Lodi, Everton Ribeiro (Paqueta 90+2), Arthur, Douglas Luiz (Guimaraes 90+2), Firmino, Gabriel Jesus, Richarlison (Everton 70).

Nov 18 - Lima
Peru 0
Argentina 2 (Gonzalez 17, L. Martinez 28)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Peru: Gallese - Corzo (Advincula 71), Santamaria, Abram, Trauco, Yotun (Calcaterra 88), Aquino (Cartagena 88), Carrillo, Cueva (Ruidiaz 81), Flores (Polo 71), Lapadula.
Argentina: Armani - Montiel, Martinez Quarta, Otamendi, Tagliafico, De Paul (Ocampos 57), Paredes, Lo Celso, Gonzalez (Di Maria 72), Messi, L. Martinez (Gomez 89).

CONMEBOL 2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFYING GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Brazil	4	4	0	0	12	2	12
2 Argentina	4	3	1	0	6	2	10
3 Ecuador	4	3	0	1	13	6	9
4 Paraguay	4	1	3	0	6	5	6
5 Uruguay	4	2	0	2	7	7	6
6 Chile	4	1	1	2	6	6	4
7 Colombia	4	1	1	2	6	11	4
8 Venezuela	4	1	0	3	2	6	3
9 Peru	4	0	1	3	4	10	1
10 Bolivia	4	0	1	3	5	12	1

WORLD CUP 2022 QUALIFIERS

EUROPE section

● *13 finals places available*

Group Stage Draw

The ten qualifying matchdays will take place from March 2021 to November 2021. The ten group winners will be guaranteed a berth at Qatar 2022. The ten group runners-up will advance to the second round (along with the best two Nations League group winners that finish outside the top two of their World Cup qualifying group). The second round will consist of three separate play-off paths, with the three winners also progressing to the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Group A
Portugal, Serbia, Republic of Ireland, Luxembourg, Azerbaijan

Group B
Spain, Sweden, Greece, Georgia, Kosovo

Group C
Italy, Switzerland, Northern Ireland, Bulgaria, Lithuania

Group D
France, Ukraine, Finland, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kazakhstan

Group E
Belgium, Wales, Czech Republic, Belarus, Estonia

Group F
Denmark, Austria, Scotland, Israel, Faroe Islands, Moldova

Group G
Netherlands, Turkey, Norway, Montenegro, Latvia, Gibraltar

Group H
Croatia, Slovakia, Russia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta

Group I
England, Poland, Hungary, Albania, Andorra, San Marino

Group J
Germany, Romania, Iceland, North Macedonia, Armenia, Liechtenstein

Club football

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

Matchday 1

Oct 20:
Chelsea (Eng) 0 Sevilla (Esp) 0; Rennes (Fra) 1 Krasnodar (Rus) 1; Zenit (Rus) 1 Club Brugge (Bel) 2; Lazio (Ita) 3 Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 1; Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 0 Juventus (Ita) 2; Barcelona (Esp) 5 Ferencvaros (Hun) 1; PSG (Fra) 1 Manchester United (Eng) 2; RB Leipzig (Ger) 2 Istanbul Basaksehir (Tur) 0

Oct 21:
RB Salzburg (Aut) 2 Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 2; Bayern Munich (Ger) 4 Atletico Madrid (Esp) 0; Real Madrid (Esp) 2 Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 3; Internazionale (Ita) 2 Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger) 2; Manchester City (Eng) 3 Porto (Por) 1; Olympiakos (Gre) 1 Marseille (Fra) 0; Ajax (Ned) 0 Liverpool (Eng) 1; Midtjylland (Den) 0 Atalanta (Ita) 4

Matchday 2

Oct 27:
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 1 Bayern Munich (Ger) 2; Atletico Madrid (Esp) 3 RB Salzburg (Aut) 2; Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 0 Inter (Ita) 0; Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger) 2 Real Madrid (Esp) 2; Porto (Por) 2 Olympiakos (Gre) 0; Marseille (Fra) 0 Manchester City (Eng) 3; Liverpool (Eng) 2 Midtjylland (Den) 0; Atalanta (Ita) 2 Ajax (Ned) 2

Oct 28:
Krasnodar (Rus) 0 Chelsea (Eng) 4; Sevilla (Esp) 1 Rennes (Fra) 0; Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 2 Zenit (Rus) 0; Club Brugge (Bel) 1 Lazio (Ita) 1; Juventus (Ita) 0 Barcelona (Esp) 2; Ferencvaros (Hun) 2 Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 2; Istanbul Basaksehir (Tur) 0 PSG (Fra) 2; Manchester United (Eng) 5 RB Leipzig (Ger) 0

Matchday 3

Nov 3:
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 1 Atletico Madrid (Esp) 1; RB Salzburg (Aut) 2 Bayern Munich (Ger) 6; Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 0 Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger) 6; Real Madrid (Esp) 3 Inter (Ita) 2; Manchester City (Eng) 3 Olympiakos (Gre) 0; Porto (Por) 3 Marseille (Fra) 0; Midtjylland (Den) 1 Ajax (Ned) 2; Atalanta (Ita) 0 Liverpool (Eng) 5

Nov 4:
Sevilla (Esp) 3 Krasnodar (Rus) 2; Chelsea (Eng) 3 Rennes (Fra) 0; Zenit (Rus) 1 Lazio (Ita) 1; Club Brugge (Bel) 0 Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 3; Barcelona (Esp) 2 Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 1; Ferencvaros (Hun) 1 Juventus (Ita) 4; Istanbul Basaksehir (Tur) 2 Manchester United (Eng) 1; RB Leipzig (Ger) 2 PSG (Fra) 1

Matchday 4

Nov 24:
Krasnodar (Rus) 1 Sevilla (Esp) 2; Rennes (Fra) 1 Chelsea (Eng) 2; Lazio (Ita) 3 Zenit (Rus) 1; Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 3 Club Brugge (Bel) 0; Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 0 Barcelona (Esp) 4; Juventus (Ita) 2 Ferencvaros (Hun) 1; Manchester United (Eng) 4 Istanbul Basaksehir (Tur) 1; PSG (Fra) 1 RB Leipzig (Ger) 0

Nov 25:
Atletico Madrid (Esp) 0 Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 0; Bayern Munich (Ger) 3 RB Salzburg (Aut) 1; Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger) 4 Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 0; Inter (Ita) 0 Real Madrid (Esp) 2; Olympiakos (Gre) 0 Manchester City (Eng) 1; Marseille (Fra) 0 Porto (Por) 2; Liverpool (Eng) 0 Atalanta (Ita) 2; Ajax (Ned) 3 Midtjylland (Den) 1

EUROPA LEAGUE 2020-21

Matchday 1

Oct 22:
Young Boys (Sui) 1 Roma (Ita) 2; CSKA Sofia (Bul) 0 CFR Cluj (Rou) 2; Dundalk (Irl) 1 Molde (Nor) 2; Rapid Vienna (Aut) 1 Arsenal (Eng) 2; Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 6 Nice (Fra) 2; Hapoel Be'er Sheva (Isr) 3 Slavia Prague (Cze) 1; Standard Liege (Bel) 0 Rangers (Sco) 2; Lech Poznan (Pol) 2 Benfica (Por) 4; PSV (Ned) 1 Granada (Esp) 2; PAOK (Gre) 1 Omonia (Cyp) 1; Napoli (Ita) 0 AZ (Ned) 1; Rijeka (Cro) 0 Real Sociedad (Esp) 1; Braga (Por) 3 AEK Athens (Gre) 0; Leicester City (Eng) 3 Zorya Luhansk (Ukr) 0; Celtic (Sco) 1 Milan (Ita) 3; Sparta Prague (Cze) 1 Lille (Fra) 4; Villarreal (Esp) 5 Sivasspor (Tur) 3; Maccabi Tel-Aviv (Isr) 1 Qarabag (Aze) 0; Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 3 LASK (Aut) 0; Ludogorets (Bul) 1 Royal Antwerp (Bel) 2; Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0 Feyenoord (Ned) 0; Wolfsberg (Aut) 1 CSKA Moscow (Rus) 1; Hoffenheim (Ger) 2 Red Star Belgrade (Srb) 0; Slovan Liberec (Cze) 1 Gent (Bel) 0

Matchday 2

Oct 29:
Roma (Ita) 0 CSKA Sofia (Bul) 0; CFR Cluj (Rou) 1 Young Boys (Sui) 1; Arsenal (Eng) 3 Dundalk (Irl) 0; Molde (Nor) 1 Rapid Vienna (Aut) 0; Slavia Prague (Cze) 1 Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 0; Nice (Fra) 1 Hapoel Be'er Sheva (Isr) 0; Benfica (Por) 3 Standard Liege (Bel) 0; Rangers (Sco) 1 Lech Poznan (Pol) 0; Omonia (Cyp) 1 PSV (Ned) 2; Granada (Esp) 0 PAOK (Gre) 0; Real Sociedad (Esp) 0 Napoli (Ita) 1; AZ (Ned) 4 Rijeka (Cro) 1; AEK Athens (Gre) 1 Leicester City (Eng) 2; Zorya Luhansk (Ukr) 1 Braga (Por) 2; Milan (Ita) 3 Sparta Prague (Cze) 0; Lille (Fra) 2 Celtic (Sco) 2; Qarabag (Aze) 1 Villarreal (Esp) 3; Sivasspor (Tur) 1 Maccabi Tel-Aviv (Isr) 2; LASK (Aut) 4 Ludogorets (Bul) 3; Royal Antwerp (Bel) 1 Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 0; CSKA Moscow (Rus) 0 Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0; Feyenoord (Ned) 1 Wolfsberg (Aut) 4; Gent (Bel) 1 Hoffenheim (Ger) 4; Res Star Belgrade (Srb) 5 Slovan Liberec (Cze) 1

Matchday 3

Nov 5:
Roma (Ita) 5 CFR Cluj (Rou) 0; Young Boys (Sui) 3 CSKA Sofia (Bul) 0; Rapid Vienna (Aut) 4 Dundalk (Irl) 3; Arsenal (Eng) 4 Molde (Nor) 1; Slavia Prague (Cze) 3 Nice (Fra) 2; Hapoel Be'er Sheva (Isr) 2 Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 4; Benfica (Por) 3 Rangers (Sco) 3; Lech Poznan (Pol) 3 Standard Liege (Bel) 1; PAOK (Gre) 4 PSV (Ned) 1; Omonia (Cyp) 0 Granada (Esp) 2; Real Sociedad (Esp) 1 AZ (Ned) 0; Rijeka (Cro) 1 Napoli (Ita) 2; Leicester City (Eng) 4 Braga (Por) 0; Zorya Luhansk (Ukr) 1 AEK Athens (Gre) 4; Celtic (Sco) 1 Sparta Prague (Cze) 4; Milan 0 Lille (Fra) 3; Sivasspor (Tur) 2 Qarabag (Aze) 0; Villarreal (Esp) 4 Maccabi Tel-Aviv (Isr) 0; Ludogorets (Bul) 1 Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 3; Royal Antwerp (Bel) 0 LASK (Aut) 1; Dinamo Zagreb (Cze) 1 Wolfsberg (Aut) 0; Feyenoord (Ned) 3 CSKA Moscow (Rus) 1; Red Star Belgrade (Srb) 2 Gent (Bel) 1; Hoffenheim (Ger) 5 Slovan Liberec (Cze) 0

Matchday 4

Nov 26:
CSKA Sofia (Bul) 0 Young Boys (Sui) 1; CFR Cluj (Rou) 0 Roma (Ita) 2; Molde (Nor) 0 Arsenal (Eng) 3; Dundalk (Irl) 1 Rapid Vienna (Aut) 3; Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 4 Hapoel Be'er Sheva (Isr) 1; Nice (Fra) 1 Slavia Prague (Cze) 3; Standard Liege (Bel) 2 Lech Poznan (Pol) 1; Rangers (Sco) 2 Benfica (Por) 2; PSV (Ned) 3 PAOK (Gre) 2; Granada (Esp) 2 Omonia (Cyp) 1; Napoli (Ita) 2 Rijeka (Cro) 0; AZ (Ned) 0 Real Sociedad (Esp) 0; Braga (Por) 3 Leicester City (Eng) 3; AEK Athens (Gre) 0 Zorya Luhansk (Ukr) 3; Sparta Prague (Cze) 4 Celtic (Sco) 1; Lille (Fra) 1 Milan (Ita) 1; Maccabi Tel-Aviv (Isr) 1 Villarreal (Esp) 1; Qarabag (Aze) 2 Sivasspor (Tur) 3; LASK (Aut) 0 Royal Antwerp (Bel) 2; Tottenham (Eng) 4 Ludogorets (Bul) 0; CSKA Moscow (Rus) 0 Feyenoord (Ned) 0; Wolfsberg (Aut) 0 Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 3; Gent (Bel) 0 Red Star Belgrade (Srb) 2; Slovan Liberec (Cze) 0 Hoffenheim (Ger) 2

UNITED STATES

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Philadelphia Union	23	14	5	4	44	20	47
Toronto	23	13	5	5	33	26	44
Columbus Crew	23	12	5	6	36	21	41
Orlando City	23	11	8	4	40	25	41
New York City	23	12	3	8	37	25	39
New York Red Bulls	23	9	5	9	29	31	32
Nashville	23	8	8	7	24	22	32
New England Revolution	23	8	8	7	26	25	32
Montreal Impact	23	8	2	13	33	43	26
Inter Miami	23	7	3	13	25	35	24
Chicago Fire	23	5	8	10	33	39	23
Atlanta United	23	6	4	13	23	30	22
D.C. United	23	5	6	12	25	41	21
Cincinnati	23	4	4	15	12	36	16

The final regular season standings were determined by points per game rather than overall points. Philadelphia Union, Toronto, Columbus Crew, Orlando City, New York City and New York Red Bulls qualify directly for the MLS play-offs – Nashville, New England Revolution, Montreal Impact and Inter Miami qualify for the MLS play-offs play-in round

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sporting Kansas City	21	12	3	6	38	25	39
Seattle Sounders	22	11	6	5	44	23	39
Portland Timbers	23	11	6	6	46	35	39
Minnesota United	21	9	7	5	36	26	34
Colorado Rapids	18	8	4	6	32	28	28
FC Dallas	22	9	7	6	28	24	34
Los Angeles FC	22	9	5	8	47	39	32
San Jose Earthquakes	23	8	6	9	35	51	30
Vancouver Whitecaps	23	9	0	14	27	44	27
LA Galaxy	22	6	4	12	27	46	22
Real Salt Lake	22	5	7	10	25	35	22
Houston Dynamo	23	4	9	10	30	40	21

The final regular season standings were determined by points per game rather than overall points. Sporting Kansas City, Seattle Sounders, Portland Timbers, Minnesota United, Colorado Rapids, FC Dallas, Los Angeles FC and San Jose Earthquakes qualify directly for the MLS play-offs

OVERALL TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Philadelphia Union	23	14	5	4	44	20	47
Toronto	23	13	5	5	33	26	44
Sporting Kansas City	21	12	3	6	38	25	39
Columbus Crew	23	12	5	6	36	21	41
Orlando City	23	11	8	4	40	25	41
Seattle Sounders	22	11	6	5	44	23	39
New York City	23	12	3	8	37	25	39
Portland Timbers	23	11	6	6	46	35	39
Minnesota United	21	9	7	5	36	26	34
Colorado Rapids	18	8	4	6	32	28	28
FC Dallas	22	9	7	6	28	24	34
Los Angeles FC	22	9	5	8	47	39	32
New York Red Bulls	23	9	5	9	29	31	32
Nashville	23	8	8	7	24	22	32
New England Revolution	23	8	8	7	26	25	32
San Jose Earthquakes	23	8	6	9	35	51	30
Vancouver Whitecaps	23	9	0	14	27	44	27
Montreal Impact	23	8	2	13	33	43	26
Inter Miami	23	7	3	13	25	35	24
LA Galaxy	22	6	4	12	27	46	22
Real Salt Lake	22	5	7	10	25	35	22
Chicago Fire	23	5	8	10	33	39	23
Atlanta United	23	6	4	13	23	30	22
D.C. United	23	5	6	12	25	41	21
Houston Dynamo	23	4	9	10	30	40	21
Cincinnati	23	4	4	15	12	36	16

Philadelphia Union win the MLS Supporters' Shield and qualify for the 2021 CONCACAF Champions League. Portland Timbers also qualify for the 2021 CONCACAF Champions League as MLS is Back champions

January 2021 *Vol. 61 No. 5*

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PICTURES
Pictures copyright: Getty Images

Thanks this issue to
Donovan Torres & Football Federation Samoa

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Great Britain: Marketforce
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PRINTING
William Gibbons & Sons Ltd

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SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES
Full annual subscription rate (13 issues)
UK: £77.87, USA & EU: £91, RoW: £98.

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World Soccer Customer Service Team
Kelsey Publishing Ltd, The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

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??????

ALBERTO J. ARMANDO STADIUM

Location: Buenos Aires, Argentina
Team: Boca Juniors
Built: 1940
Capacity: 54,000

Getting to see Boca Juniors play at home will be top of many football fans' bucket lists, with a "*Superclasico*" against River Plate the dream fixture.

As well as being the home of Boca, the Argentina national team have also played at the famous arena, most recently in two of their 2022 World Cup qualifiers against Ecuador and Paraguay.

Situated in La Boca, the district of Buenos Aires which gives Juniors their name, the arena is officially called the Alberto J. Armando Stadium, but is usually referred to as "La Bombonera" – meaning "The Chocolate Box".

La Bombonera certainly isn't for the faint-hearted. In 2015, the official website for the Copa Libertadores ran a poll to identify the competition's most "feared" ground, with La Bombonera coming out on top thanks to its intense atmosphere.

Rivalry... the view from outside the ground ahead of a *Superclasico*

Intimidating...La Bombonera is a tough place to go for visiting sides

Tribute...remembering legend Diego Maradona

GREATEST GAMES

1969 August 31
Argentina 2-2 Peru

Peru travelled to Buenos Aires for this 1970 World Cup qualifier having never made it to a World Cup since the first edition back in 1930, while Argentina had been to every single one that they had entered. Despite a hostile atmosphere, with irate home fans hurling objects at them, Peru managed to hang on for a draw that sent them to Mexico, and simultaneously eliminated Argentina.

2000 May 24
Boca Juniors 3-0 River Plate

This Copa Libertadores quarter-final second leg remains a favourite for Boca fans. River went into the game with a 2-1 lead, thanks to a thrilling front line featuring Pablo Aimar, Ariel Ortega, Javier Saviola and Juan Pablo Angel. However, Juan Roman Riquelme stole the show, putting on a creative masterclass to take his team to a famous victory. In the final, they won their first of four Copas in eight seasons.

2001 November 10
Argentina XI 6-3 Rest of the World XI

Diego Maradona chose La Bombonera for his testimonial match where he lined up alongside the likes of Juan Sebastian Veron, Hristo Stoichkov, Eric Cantona and Davor Suker to say goodbye. The game was watched by 50,000 supporters inside the ground – including Pele and Michel Platini – and millions across the world.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE JANUARY 22

Diego **MARADONA**

1960–2020

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YEARBOOK OF EUROPEAN FOOTBALL 2020-2021

Our Yearbook of European Football, published as a replacement for the defunct *European Football Yearbook* covers domestic and international football during the 2019/2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches played by all 55 UEFA member countries with basic info (name, date of birth and club) for those who played in these games. For domestic football it contains an historical list of champions and top scorers for each country, results of top division games and a final league table for the past season, information about each National Cup Final, player listings for top division clubs (with appearances and substitute appearances) plus some other statistics. Also includes full statistics for the Champions League and Europa League 2019/2020.

Softback Price £39.95 ***Postage Rate 'G'***

THE FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

Formerly the *Rothmans Football Yearbook* and *Sky Sports Football Yearbook*, the 51st edition of this bestselling title contains over 1,000 pages packed with statistical information about British football during the 2019/2020 season.

Softback Price £25.00 • Hardback Price £45.00

Postage Rate of each edition is 'D'

NON-LEAGUE CLUB DIRECTORY 2020/21

The 43rd edition of this English Non-League football 'bible' is endorsed by the Football Association and is packed with information about more than 600 clubs in steps 1 to 6 of the English non-league football pyramid.

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THE COMPLETE BELGIUM FC 1904-2020

A complete match-by-match statistical record of every game played by the Belgian national team from their very first match in 1904 through to the end of 2020. Includes full line-ups for both teams, scores, scorers, attendance and venue.

Softback Price £19.50 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

THE COMPLETE ITALY FC 1898-2020

A complete match-by-match statistical record of every game played by the Italian national team from their first match in 1898 to the end of 2020. Includes full line-ups for both teams, scores, scorers, attendance and venue.

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THE COMPLETE NETHERLANDS FC 1905-2020

A complete match-by-match statistical record of every game played by the Dutch national team from their first match in 1905 to the end of 2020. Includes full line-ups for both teams, scores, scorers, attendance and venue.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE SEASON PREVIEW MAGAZINES

KICKER SONDERHEFT BUNDESLIGA 2020/2021 (GERMANY SEASON PREVIEW)

A German-language, magazine-style preview of the 2020/21 season in the German Bundesliga. Well-illustrated in full-colour with full-page team photos for the top two divisions plus smaller team photos for clubs in the 3.Liga. Includes player info and photos for the top division clubs.

Softback Price £14.99 ***Postage Rate 'C'***

GUERIN SPORTIVO CALCIO ITALY 2020-2021 (ITALY SEASON PREVIEW)

An Italian-language magazine preview of the 2020/2021 season in Serie A and Serie B. Contains player statistics and individual player photos for Serie A teams plus less detailed Serie B info.

Softback Price £14.99 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

FOOT MAGAZINE SPECIAL COMPETITION 2020-2021 (BELGIUM SEASON PREVIEW)

A French-language, magazine-style preview of the 2020-2021 season in the Belgian League. Well-illustrated with team photos covering a two-page spread plus player photos and information.

Softback Price £12.99 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

CADERNOS DE A BOLA FUTEBOL 2020/2021 (PORTUGAL SEASON PREVIEW)

A Portuguese-language, magazine-style preview of the 2020/2021 season in the Portuguese League. Well-illustrated in full-colour with team photographs plus player photos and statistics.

Softback Price £13.99 ***Postage Rate 'B'***

VOETBAL INTERNATIONAL SEIZOENGIDS 2020-2021 (NETHERLANDS SEASON PREVIEW)

A Dutch-language, magazine preview of the 2020/21 season in the Dutch League. Well-illustrated in full-colour with player photos & stats for the top division and player info for 2nd division clubs

Softback Price £17.99 ***Postage Rate 'C'***

BUNDESLIGA JOURNAL 2020 (AUSTRIA SEASON PREVIEW)

A German-language, well-illustrated, full-colour magazine-style preview of the 2020/2021 season in the top division of Austrian football. Includes team photographs and player information.

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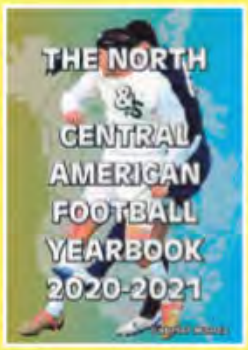

THE SOUTH AMERICAN FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

A 555-page statistical yearbook about South American football during the 2019-2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches, a historical list of domestic champions for each country, results of every League game, a final League table for the past season, National Cup Final info and player listings for the top division. Includes full statistics for the Copa Libertadores 2019 and Copa Sudamericana 2019.

Softback Price £36.50 ***Postage Rate 'D'***

THE NORTH & CENTRAL AMERICAN FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

A 499-page statistical yearbook about football in North & Central America plus the Caribbean during the 2019-2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches and a historical list of domestic champions in each country, a final League table for the past season, National Cup Final information and top division player listings.

Softback Price £36.50 ***Postage Rate 'D'***

THE ASIAN FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2020-2021

A 605-page yearbook of domestic and international football in Asia during the 2019-2020 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches played by the 47 Asian countries plus basic information for those who played. For domestic football, this book contains a historical list of champions for each country, a final League table for the past season and information about each National Cup Final. Further details are included about the leading clubs in some of the larger countries as are full line-ups and statistics for the AFC Champions League 2019 and AFC Cup 2019.

Softback Price £36.50 ***Postage Rate 'D'***

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